

## Volunteering in Germany: key findings of the Fifth German Survey on Volunteering (FWS 2019)

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Federal Ministry for  
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,  
Women and Youth

# Volunteering in Germany

Key Findings of the Fifth German Survey on Volunteering (FWS 2019)





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Christine Hagen, Nicole Hameister, Oliver Huxhold & Clemens Tesch-Römer



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# Key Findings

**In 2019, 28.8 million people are engaged in voluntary work in Germany, representing 39.7 per cent of the country's population aged 14 and above.** This rate of volunteering has remained steady between 2014 and 2019.

**The rate of people engaged in volunteering has grown over the last twenty years.** In 2019, 39.7 per cent of people aged 14 and above living in Germany are involved in some voluntary activity. In the year 1999 that figure was only 30.9 per cent. Looking at the figures over time, similar rates of volunteering can be seen in the years 1999, 2004 and 2009 (30.9, 32.7 and 31.9 per cent respectively), and also similar rates between the years 2014 and 2019 (40.0 and 39.7 per cent respectively).

**For the first time, we present the results of all waves of the Survey on Volunteering additionally weighted by educational attainment.** This is necessary due to the fact that people with higher educational attainment are often over-represented in survey studies, and, at the same time, also tend to be more involved in voluntary work than people with a low or medium educational level. The current results – now weighted throughout by educational attainment – describe the factual situation in the population more accurately than the figures reported previously. The rates of volunteering for all survey waves have fallen by three to four percentage points as a result of the additional weighting for education as compared to the rates as calculated before conducting that weighting. Looking at rates of volunteering over time, the level changes, but the

trend of increasing volunteer rates over the last twenty years essentially remains intact.

**For the first time since 1999, women and men show no difference in terms of their rates of volunteering in 2019.** Whereas men have consistently volunteered to a larger extent than women in every wave since 1999, the figures for 2019 have, for the first time ever, yielded no statistically significant gender difference in rates of volunteering (women: 39.2 per cent, men: 40.2 per cent). This can be ascribed to the fact that numbers for women engaged in voluntary work have increased faster than for their male peers. An additional factor is the fact that the rate for men engaged in voluntary work fell a little between 2014 and 2019.

**The rate of volunteering has grown in all age groups since 1999.** However, this rate of growth has differed from age group to age group. The increase has been particularly pronounced among people aged 65 and above: the rate of volunteering for that age category has risen from only 18.0 per cent in 1999 to 31.2 per cent in 2019. The highest rate of volunteering for 2019 is found among those aged between 30 and 49 years, with 44.7 per cent. The rate for those from 14 to 29 years is 42.0, and 40.6 per cent for 50- to 64-year-olds.

**The differences in the rates of volunteering between different educational groups have increased between 1999 and 2019.** This can be ascribed to the fact that the rates of volunteering among people still attending school and among people with higher-level school education have

increased more than for people with medium-level school education. In the case of people with a lower-level school qualification, the rate of volunteering has not changed significantly between 1999 and 2019. In 2019, people with higher-level school education are involved in voluntary activities at a rate of 51.1 per cent, while the rate for those with medium-level school education is 37.4 per cent, and 26.3 per cent for those with a lower level of education.

**The rate of volunteering for people with a migrant background has not changed in the period between 2014 and 2019.** In both 2014 and 2019, people with a migrant background became involved in voluntary work at a lower rate than people without a migrant background. Whereas in 2019 people without a migrant background became active in voluntary work at a rate of 44.4 per cent, the rate for people with a migrant background was 27.0 per cent. Within the group of people with a migrant background, those who have no personal experience of immigration tend to be more likely to volunteer than people who have experienced immigration personally. The rate of volunteering among people with a migrant background born in Germany and with German citizenship is 38.7 per cent in 2019.

**The differences in rates of volunteering in eastern and western Germany have progressively narrowed since 1999.** In 2019, the rate of volunteering in eastern Germany (including Berlin), at 37.0 per cent, is now only 3.4 percentage points lower than the rate for western Germany, at 40.4 per cent. In 1999, the difference in rates of volunteering between the two regions was as much as 7.9 percentage points.

**Eight per cent of volunteers are involved in voluntary activities for refugees or asylum seekers in 2019.** Women are more involved in voluntary activities for refugees or asylum seekers (at 8.9 per cent) than men (at 7.2 per cent). People of the various age groups carry out voluntary activities for refugees and asylum seekers to an equal extent – no statistically significant differences can be seen between the age groups.

**In 2019, about seventeen per cent of volunteers dedicate a major portion of their time to their voluntary activity, spending six or more hours per week on such activity.** There has been an ongoing trend since 1999 towards less time-intensive voluntary activity: between 1999 and 2019, the percentage of volunteers who dedicate a major proportion of their time to such activity with six or more hours per week, fell by 5.9 percentage points. In the same period, the percentage of those dedicating significantly less time in their voluntary activity – up to two hours per week – increased (1999: 50.8 per cent; 2019: 60.0 per cent).

**One in every four volunteers exercises a management or board position in their voluntary activity.** The proportion of volunteers taking on a management or board position has fallen over time. In 1999, 36.8 per cent of volunteers were involved in a leadership role, while the figure for 2019 has fallen to 26.3 per cent.

**In 2019, a large proportion of volunteers are using the internet as part of their voluntary activity.** A total of 57.0 per cent of volunteers, in 2019, indicate that they use the internet for their voluntary activity. This figure has remained at a similar level since 2009. In 2004, the survey wave in which internet usage for voluntary activity was first recorded, the figure was 39.2 per cent.



# 1

## Introduction

Voluntary engagement is an important pillar of society. As society changes, so does the way in which voluntary commitment is carried on within that society. In the last few decades, new forms, new emphases and new ways of organising volunteering have emerged that now play a decisive role in shaping how people engage in voluntary work.

The enormous socio-political importance of voluntary engagement is heavily emphasised in the social discourse. Volunteering can contribute to societal cohesion and is an indispensable factor in maintaining a successful and vibrant democracy (Roth 2010; Verba et alia 1995). In addition, it can also have a positive effect both for the target groups of such activity and for volunteers themselves. Against this background, it is important to report on the current situation of voluntary engagement at regular intervals.

The *German Survey on Volunteering (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey, FWS)* has, for two decades, provided the basis for drawing up a report on the current state of affairs and on developments affecting volunteering in Germany. This telephone-based representative study of the German population aged 14 and above has been conducted for this purpose every five years since 1999. This short report presents the findings of the fifth wave of the German Survey on Volunteering, which was conducted in 2019. It also retraces how voluntary commitment has been evolving over the last twenty years on the basis of the data obtained through all five waves of the survey.

### Definition of “volunteering”

In the Survey on Volunteering, activities that are undertaken voluntarily in the interest of the community in the public arena and that are not directed towards material gain are recorded as voluntary engagement. In this way, the definition used by the Survey on Volunteering largely covers the terminology fixed by the 2002 *Enquete-Kommission “Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements”* (Commission of Inquiry “The Future of Civic Engagement” – German Bundestag 2002).

Voluntary engagement encompasses a multitude of tasks and activities. Volunteers take on a variety of voluntary positions in local and municipal councils; they become involved in civic initiatives of a political nature, they teach children how to swim, and prepare religious events, they organise concerts and put out fires, they distribute food to the needy and intercede in disputes between neighbours, they protect the environment and intervene in the interests of refugees. The experience that people gain in volunteering is no less wide-ranging than the tasks that they undertake. These tasks are often very demanding, with the consequence that not everyone has the same level of access to voluntary engagement. To be in a position to investigate inequalities in access to voluntary engagement, one must take the distinctions between different sections of the population into account. Due to their differing living circumstances, women and men and people of differing ages and levels of education can often enjoy very different opportunities for taking up voluntary commitments.

## Social change and volunteering

The underlying social conditions, and the changes that those conditions are subject to, over time exert an effect over voluntary engagement and over the forms within which it is practised. A variety of significant societal changes have occurred between 1999 and 2019 that have had an impact on the underlying conditions for the development of voluntary engagement in Germany: changes in the direction of greater equality between women and men, in the continued expansion of education, in the progress of the digital transformation in almost all areas of society, the growing role of women in the economy and also the changes occurring in the phases of life of older people, including a tendency towards better health among older people (Tesch-Römer et alia 2017). This has led not only to changes in the extent of public participation in voluntary commitment, but also to transformed and even entirely new forms of such commitment. Voluntary activities now spring more frequently from outside established structures, and digital instruments of communication and information are now being integrated into the practice of voluntary activity. In addition to this, the target groups and objectives of voluntary commitment are changing.

Societal change is exerting an influence on the Survey on Volunteering through the survey's adoption of new topics of study. In 2019, questions were added for the first time on the voluntary engagement both of and for refugees, on patterns of use of the internet within voluntary activity, on attitudes towards democracy and on the purpose of financial donations. The adoption of these new topics has allowed us to represent ongoing societal developments and phenomena within the data of the Survey on Volunteering.

## Consistency of and ongoing development in the Survey on Volunteering

When developing the Survey on Volunteering, one needs to consider the need to preserve consistency. The central features of the Survey on

Volunteering must be retained unchanged as far as possible in order to preserve comparability between the 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 waves of the survey. At the same time, it is also important to engage in ongoing development of the survey, not just in terms of its contents but also in relation to methodology wherever there are good reasons to make such changes.

In 2014, a series of methodological changes were made whose purpose it was to improve the survey's capacity to describe the voluntary commitments of the population. Among these changes was an enhancement to the random sampling methodology to include mobile numbers, an extension of the interviews and a change to the commitment questionnaire to add a time window of 12 months (see the methodological appendix). These methodological changes may have had an impact on concrete results. Because the new methodological elements first included in 2014 were also present in 2019, it is now possible to assess the extent to which trends in volunteering can be attributed to societal change and/or to changes in methodology (see section 2).

A further important methodological adjustment was made in 2019. The data contained in the Survey on Volunteering have been weighted ever since 1999. The features weighted in the results published for 1999 to 2014 were gender, age, federal state and size-based typology of municipality. In order to be able to make a more accurate assessment of the rate of volunteering, in the report on the 2019 Survey on Volunteering a weighting for school educational attainment was added for the first time for all analyses and for all survey waves. One of the consequences of this is that the rate of volunteering for all survey years is now up to four percentage points lower than reported up until now (see section 2). When one looks at rates of volunteering over time, the level changes, but the trend of increasing volunteer rates over the last twenty years remains essentially intact. In other results, too, deviations from the data given in earlier publications can be seen.

## 1 Introduction

All results are tested for statistical significance (using a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ ). The test for statistical significance indicates if a particular difference found using the data from the Survey on Volunteering is also likely to be present in a population, for example, in the resident population of Germany (statistically significant), or if it is likely to be present in that data merely by chance (not statistically significant). You will find information on the results of tests for statistical significance in the details printed under the illustrations.

### **An overview of the contents of the short report**

This short report presents the central results of the Survey on Volunteering. The first four sections of the short report cover the topic of voluntary engagement in society. They include insights into how voluntary commitment has evolved over the last twenty years and into differences and inequalities between population groups that exist in voluntary commitment. We will show the societal areas in which voluntary engagement is going on. We will also show developments over the last few years associated with the arrival of refugees by putting a focus on voluntary engagement for refugees. In subsequent sections, we will present some important aspects of the patterns that one can see within voluntary engagement. On the one hand, we will examine changes in the amount of time spent on voluntary activities and in the take-up of management or board positions in voluntary activities. On the other, we will also consider one of the central societal trends of the 21st century – the digital transformation. We will look at the prevalence, intensity and forms of internet use in voluntary activity.

The report presents the findings for the entire population (either as a comparison over time or for the current survey year, 2019), as well as differentiated by gender and age group. In section 3, “Differences and Inequalities in Volunteering”, the figures for volunteers are also presented according to educational attainment, migrant background and regional classifications (east-west, urban-rural). See the methodological appendix for more information on the differentiating characteristics used.

An even more comprehensive picture of volunteering, showing other aspects of the phenomenon, will be drawn up in the main report on the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, which will be published during the course of 2021. Taken aside from the many societally relevant events that were considered in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, it is well worth emphasising that neither this short report nor the main report on the 2019 Survey on Volunteering can make statements about the impact of the Corona pandemic on the phenomenon of volunteering. Data collection for the Fifth German Survey on Volunteering was conducted in 2019. This means that data collection had been completed before the Corona pandemic had begun. Further data will, therefore, need to be collected in the future to come to any conclusions on the changes that have occurred in voluntary engagement due to the Corona pandemic.

## 2 Volunteering Over the Years

Various societal developments have taken place over recent decades that also have relevance to how the phenomenon of volunteering has developed in Germany, including the growing equality between women and men and the continued expansion of educational opportunities (Tesch-Römer et alia 2017). These developments have improved the opportunities for entry into volunteering and may have contributed to an increase in the numbers of volunteers.

### **In 2019, 39.7 per cent of Germany's population aged 14 years and above are involved in voluntary work**

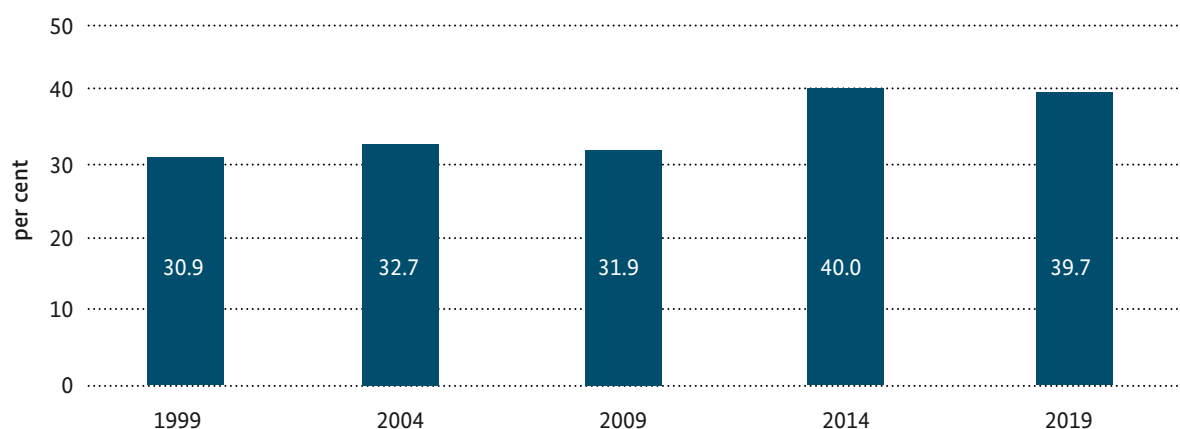
In 2019, 39.7 per cent of people aged 14 years and above living in Germany are involved in at least one voluntary activity. That adds up to about 28.8 million individuals. A roughly equal rate of

volunteering can be observed between the years 2014 and 2019. The rate of volunteering was 40.0 per cent in 2014 and 39.7 per cent in 2019, showing a statistically insignificant difference (see Figure 2-1).

### **The rate of people engaged in voluntary work has grown over the last twenty years**

The figure for voluntary engagement has increased between 1999 and 2019. In 1999, 30.9 per cent of people aged 14 years and above living in Germany were involved in at least one voluntary activity (see Figure 2-1). In 2004, the rate of volunteering was 32.7 per cent, and 31.9 per cent in 2009. By 2014 the rate of volunteering had grown to 40.0 per cent. The rate for the year 2019 is 39.7 per cent.

Figure 2–1: Rates of volunteering, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

All the differences are statistically significant, with the exception of the difference between 1999 and 2009, between 2004 and 2009 and between 2014 and 2019.

In absolute numbers, too, the figure for voluntary engagement has grown since 1999. In 2019, about 28.8 million people are involved in voluntary work, a similar number to that for 2014 (28.4 million).<sup>1</sup> In 1999, 21.6 million had a voluntary commitment; in 2004, the absolute figure was 23.4 million and, in 2009, it was 22.8 million.

The following text discusses the methodological considerations that, in addition to the relevant societal changes, contribute to the trends observed in rates of volunteering. Thereby, we will address the weighting for school education, verification of the data on voluntary activities as well as the modifications made to the questionnaire.

*The newly introduced weighting factor for educational attainment has impacted upon rates of volunteering, though the trends in the development of voluntary engagement remain essentially intact.*

For the first time, the data from the 2019 Survey on Volunteering will also be weighted by school education in all analyses for the purposes of the report. This change of approach, therefore, also affects the figures for rates of volunteering reported in earlier waves of the survey. The

adjustment to the weighting process is made necessary by the fact that people with a higher level of education are generally overrepresented in survey-based studies as compared to their presence in the population. This overrepresentation applies to the Survey on Volunteering as well. At the same time, people with a higher level of education are more likely to be engaged in voluntary work than people with a lower level of education. For this reason, rates of volunteering would be overestimated if the education factor were not taken into consideration.

In order to give an accurate picture of voluntary engagement within the population, the data of the Survey on Volunteering must, therefore, be weighted by educational attainment. In this step, people with higher educational attainment, who are more strongly represented in the sample, are given a lower weighting and those with lower educational attainment, who are less strongly represented in the sample, are given a higher weighting. After the weighting including education factor has been applied, rates of volunteering end up lower for all survey waves than the rates presented in previous reports (see Table 2–1). The difference amounts to about three to four per-

<sup>1</sup> The slight growth in the absolute number of volunteers in 2019 as compared to 2014 is due to the growth in the population of Germany during the intervening period: In 2014, the number of people over 14 years of age living in Germany was about 71.1 million, as opposed to a figure of about 72.5 million in 2019 (Federal Statistical Office 2020).

centage points. The assumptions made earlier on the size of volunteer rates are, therefore, in need of correction. When one looks at rates of volunteering over time, the level changes, but the trend of increasing volunteer rates over the last twenty years remains essentially intact. In other results,

too, deviations from the data given in earlier publications can be seen. The rates as weighted additionally by education, however, represent the situation of the overall population more accurately than before.

Table 2–1: Comparison of rates of volunteering both with and without consideration of the educational attainment weighting factor, over time, 1999–2019

	FWS 1999	FWS 2004	FWS 2009	FWS 2014	FWS 2019
Volunteer rate not considering education as a weighting factor	34.0	35.7	35.9	43.6	43.6
Volunteer rate considering education as a weighting factor	30.9	32.7	31.9	40.0	39.7
Percentage-point difference	–3.1	–3.0	–4.0	–3.6	–3.9

Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

*The differing approaches to checking the data on volunteering probably underestimate an increase in the rate between 1999 and 2009.*

For the period from 1999 to 2009, the findings presented in Figure 2–1 show a plateau in the rate of volunteering. However, there are good grounds to assume that there was an increase in the rate of volunteering in the first decade of the Survey on Volunteering that could not be identified due to methodological considerations. It is likely that changing approaches to checking the data on voluntary engagement between 1999 and 2009 have had the effect of underestimating the increase in volunteer rates over this period (Vogel et alia 2017). Respondents who have reported being engaged in voluntary activity in the survey then go on to give information on the activities in which they are engaged. In all survey waves these entries were checked both during and after the interview stage. In any case of contradiction with the applicable definition of voluntary engagement in the information given by the respondents, the affected activities were recoded from ‘volunteer-

ing’ to ‘non-volunteering’. If the respondent gave a total of one voluntary activity in the interview and this is recoded from ‘volunteering’ to ‘non-volunteering’, then that person is also counted accordingly as a ‘non-volunteer’. Where a respondent has listed more than one voluntary activity, that person counts as a ‘non-volunteer’ if and only if all activities listed have been recoded as ‘non-volunteering’. For the year 2014, a catalogue of criteria was drawn up and published by the DZA to ensure that the open disclosures could be checked with transparency (see methodological appendix). This catalogue of criteria was employed once again in 2019.

The rate at which entries were recoded from ‘volunteering’ to ‘non-volunteering’ increased consistently in the years 1999 to 2009, without any explanation as to what may have underlain this increase. As a result, the rate of volunteering was increasingly heavily readjusted downward over the course of the first three waves. This phenomenon can be seen when one makes a comparison between the rates of volunteering before and after

the relevant check is made (see Table 2–2). Before checking, the various rates of volunteering were 32.0 per cent (in 1999), 34.7 per cent (in 2004) and 35.6 per cent (in 2009). After checking, the corresponding rates were 30.9 per cent (in 1999), 32.7 per cent (in 2004) and 31.9 per cent (in 2009). Thus, rates before the checks indicate an increase

in the rate of volunteering, while the rates afterwards show the above-mentioned plateau in volunteer rates over the first decade of the survey. One might conclude, therefore, that the checking procedures on the data for voluntary engagement conceal an increase in the rate of volunteering in the years 1999 to 2009.

Table 2–2: Comparison of rates of volunteering before and after checking entries on voluntary engagement, over time, 1999–2019

	FWS 1999	FWS 2004	FWS 2009	FWS 2014	FWS 2019
Rate of volunteering before checking	32.0	34.7	35.6	40.8	40.2
Rate of volunteering after checking	30.9	32.7	31.9	40.0	39.7
Percentage-point difference	–1.1	–2.0	–3.7	–0.8	–0.5

Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

*The changes made in how volunteering was recorded in 2014 may have contributed to the increase in the rate of volunteering between 2009 and 2014.*

If there was indeed an increase in the rate of volunteering in the years from 1999 to 2009, it is also likely that the change in the rate between 2009 and 2014 is not as pronounced as it appears to be in Figure 2–1. However, the 2014 change in the way volunteering is recorded may also have contributed to the increase in the volunteer rate between 2009 and 2014. The questions on activities and voluntary engagement were asked in the 2014 Survey using a clearly defined time window (“in the last twelve months”) for the first time ever. In the first three survey waves, no time window was specified (the term “currently” was used instead).

The addition of a clearly defined time window was designed both to help ensure that respondents are all reporting according to a uniform time frame of reference and that seasonal voluntary activities are better captured in the survey. It is possible that surveying with a clearly defined time window of

twelve months also contributes to activities done at irregular intervals – an important component of any civil society – being better captured than in surveys that do not contain a clear time specification. It may, however, be that activities done at irregular intervals remain undiscovered where respondents either assess the relevant time period differently or think in terms of a shorter time period when asked a question that does not include a specific time window.

**Between 1999 and 2019, the figures for people actively involved in at least one of fourteen societal areas increased slightly from its already high rate at the beginning of the period**

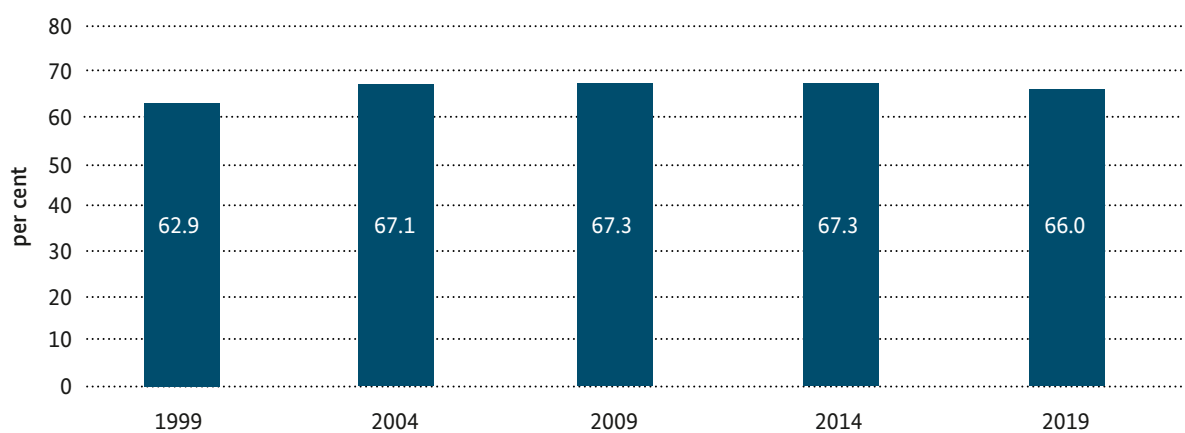
One can participate in society and be active in the community and the public sphere even below the threshold for it to be defined as voluntary work – by taking part in sporting events or leisure activities as part of a club, for example. And such community activities can, in turn, offer opportunities to get involved in voluntary engagement. In the Survey on Volunteering, therefore, the question on community activities is asked before going on to the questions on voluntary engagement (see



the methodological appendix). The figures for people active in the community and in public life – that is, for people actively involved in at least one of fourteen societal areas included in the Survey on Volunteering – have also increased over the period since 1999: from 62.9 per cent in 1999 to 66.0 per cent in 2019 (Figure 2–2). However, this increase follows a different pattern to that seen in

voluntary engagement: The rate of people involved in public community activities was 62.9 per cent in 1999 and had increased by more than four percentage points by 2004. In the subsequent survey years of 2009 and 2014, this rate of activity remained at about 67 per cent. The rate dropped slightly, though statistically significantly, to 66.0 per cent, between then and 2019.

Figure 2–2: Rates of people involved in public community activities, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

The differences between 1999 and the three subsequent survey years (2004, 2009 and 2014) are statistically significant. The difference between 2014 and 2019 is also statistically significant. All other differences are not statistically significant.

## Conclusion

Voluntary engagement is regarded as being highly valuable in German society. The 2019 Survey on Volunteering reveals that 39.7 per cent of German residents of 14 years of age or above engage in voluntary work. The rate of volunteering has grown over the last two decades.

Numerous societal changes that have taken place over the past two decades, including the greater participation of women in the labour force, continued expansion in education, changes in the life circumstances of older people with their improved health situation, an increased number of clubs and the greater prominence of public discussions on voluntary engagement, all speak for the actual increase that has occurred in volunteering since 1999 (Tesch-Römer et alia

2017). Increased time constraints due to increased work commitments and the ever more blurry boundary between work and private life may have contributed to the stabilisation of the figures for people engaged in voluntary work in Germany observed since 2014 (Eurofound & International Labour Office 2017).

Not only the Survey on Volunteering, but also other survey-based studies, such as the German Ageing Survey (DEAS, own calculations) or the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP; Burkhardt & Schupp 2019), show increases in volunteering for the entire period, but no substantial change in volunteer rates between 2014 and 2019. This provides further evidence of an overall increase in volunteering over the last twenty years, with the figures levelling out at its peak from 2014 on. Nor did the number of clubs, through which a large



share of volunteer work is done, increase as much after 2014 as it had done before then (Priemer et alia 2019).

Although it is quite plausible to assume that there has been an increase in volunteering between 1999 and 2019 against the backdrop of a wide variety of societal changes, the two plateaus in the rate of volunteering that can be observed (the first plateau being visible from 1999, through 2004 to 2009, and the second one between 2014 and 2019), pose the critical question as to what extent this is a genuine increase, reflecting real societal changes, and to what extent the increase is due to methodological changes in the design and procedures used in the Survey on Volunteering. Methodological differences in the procedures used to verify the data on volunteering in the years 1999 to 2009 may have concealed an increase in the rate of volunteering during that period. In addition, it is also possible that the changes made in 2014 to the question on voluntary engagement have contributed to the growth in the rate of volunteering between 2009 and 2014. The addition of a weighting factor to include school education has had the effect of producing lower rates of volunteering and projections than those previously reported, although the observed trend in participation in voluntary engagement remains largely unchanged.

These methodological considerations make it clear that voluntary engagement should not be considered a ‘natural phenomenon’ that can be measured using a simple procedure. In determining the rate (and absolute number) of people engaged in voluntary work, one first needs to define precisely what voluntary engagement consists of. There is now a generally recognised meaning for the concept, ever since a definition was provided by the *Enquete-Kommission “Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements”* (Commission of Inquiry “The Future of Civic Engagement” – *Deutscher Bundestag* 2002). In 2014, based on this definition, a catalogue of criteria was drawn up and published on the basis of which the decisions as to whether a case should be counted as ‘volunteering’ were made comprehensible and transparent. Furthermore, the addition in 2014 of a twelve-month window took account of the existence of both seasonal and short-term forms of voluntary engagement. Such forms of engage-

ment are less well captured in queries that merely use the term “currently”, specifying an unclear, though presumably narrow, time frame in the minds of respondents. Yet it is also the case that this methodological decision, however reasonable it may be, can have an impact on how the rate of volunteering is assessed.

Both long-term changes and the current status quo in volunteering are important when it comes to drawing up policy on voluntary engagement. In any effort to promote voluntary engagement, knowledge of the differences and inequalities that exist in accessing voluntary work is also indispensable – and that is the topic we deal with in the next section.

# 3

## Differences and Inequalities in Volunteering

Opportunity structures and framework conditions for volunteering can change, and are influenced by social change and transformations occurring in civil society. The question of whether one becomes engaged in voluntary activity or not also depends on a variety of individual factors. The commitment to take on a voluntary activity is connected with a range of personal pre-conditions: The person must have access to voluntary engagement: this means that one must be sufficiently socially embedded and networked. They must also have enough free time available to them; they must be prepared to take on the (additional) demands and burdens that a voluntary activity can bring with it and they must possess – depending on the chosen area of activity – appropriate knowledge and abilities. These personal factors that condition the acceptance and exercise of a voluntary commitment can vary substantially between different population groups and according to their differing living circumstances (see, for example, Simonson et alia 2013; Tang 2006; Vogel et alia 2017; Wetzel & Simonson 2017).

**For the first time since 1999, women and men show no difference in terms of their rates of volunteering in 2019**

In 2019, 39.7 per cent of Germany's resident population aged 14 years and above are engaged in voluntary activities. Whereas men have consistently volunteered in larger proportions in every wave since 1999, for the first time ever, the figures for 2019 yielded no statistically significant gender

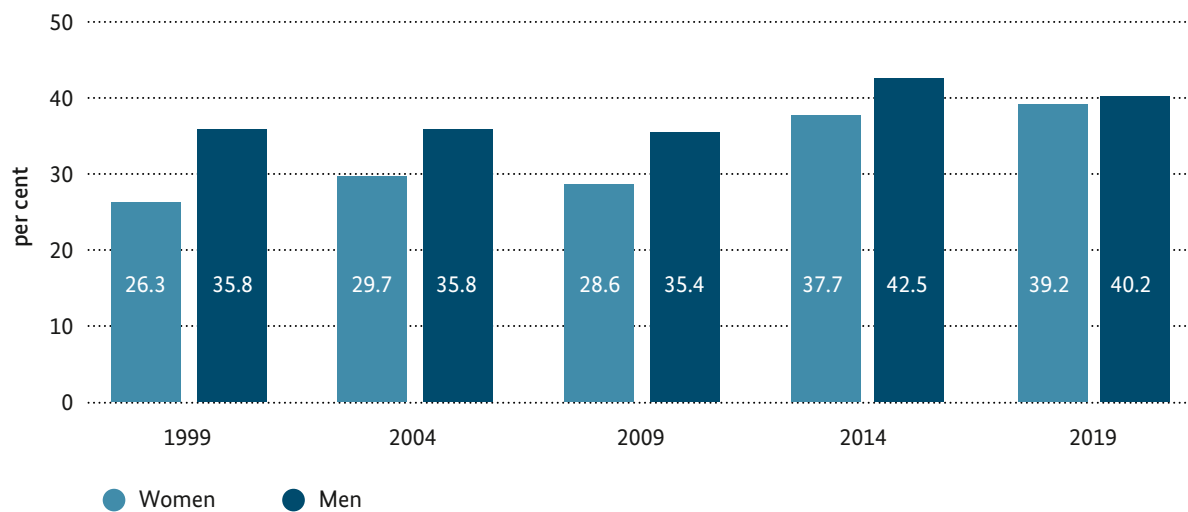
difference in the rate of volunteering between men and women: 39.2 per cent of women and 40.2 per cent of men are engaged in voluntary activities. This fact can be ascribed to the fact that numbers for women engaged in voluntary commitment have increased faster than for men (Figure 3–1). The rate of volunteering for men has declined somewhat since 2014, possibly because men are increasingly involved in care activities within the family (Schober & Zoch 2019; Tamm 2019), but possibly also due to structural changes in civil society towards forms of engagement that tend to be organised more informally – forms that are taken up to a greater extent by women.

**The rate of volunteering has increased in all age groups since 1999, but most strongly among people aged 65 years and above**

When looked at by age group, the figures for volunteering have increased in all four age groups since 1999, albeit to a different degree and according to different dynamics in each case (Figure 3–2). In both the age groups from 14 to 29 years and from 30 to 49 years a significant increase in volunteering can be detected, though only from 2009 onwards. In the age groups from 50 to 64 years and 65 years and above, a statistically significant increase in the rate of volunteering can be detected as early as between the years 1999 and 2004, a phenomenon which continues to predominate up until 2014. No statistically significant change can be found in the rate of volunteering between 2014 and 2019 for any of the age groups considered in the analysis.

### 3 Differences and Inequalities in Volunteering

Figure 3–1: Rates of volunteering, by gender, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all respondents)

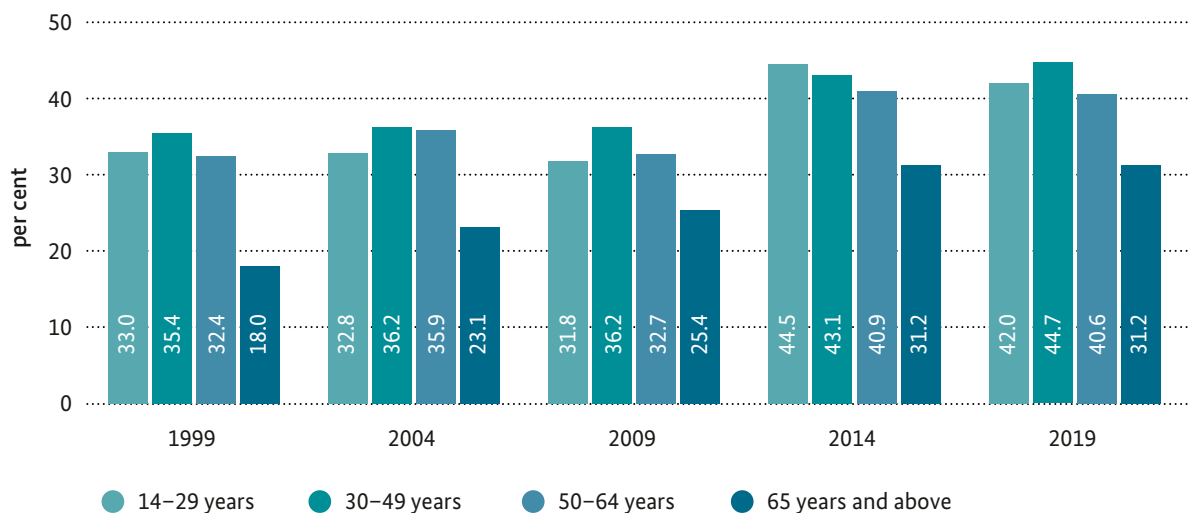


Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

The differences in trends among women are all statistically significant, with the exception of the differences between 2004 and 2009, and between 2014 and 2019. The differences in trends among men are statistically significant, with the exception of the difference between 1999 and 2004, between 1999 and 2009, and between 2004 and 2009.

The differences between the genders are statistically significant for all years, with the exception of 2019.

Figure 3–2: Rates of volunteering, by four age groups, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,901), FWS 2004 (n=14,974), FWS 2009 (n=19,945), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

The differences in trends are statistically significant for all age groups between the years 1999 and 2014, 2004 and 2014, and 2009 and 2014, as well as between 1999 and 2019, 2004 and 2019 and the years 2009 and 2019. In addition, for 50- to 64-year-olds, the differences between 1999 and 2004 and between 2004 and 2009 are also statistically significant. In addition, for the 65-year-olds and older group, the differences between 1999 and 2004 and between 1999 and 2009 are also statistically significant.

The differences between 14- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 49-year-olds are statistically significant for the years 2004 and 2009. The differences between 14- to 29-year-olds and 50- to 64-year-olds are statistically significant for the year 2014. The differences between 30- to 49-year-olds and 50- to 64-year-olds are statistically significant for the years 1999, 2009, 2014 and 2019. The differences between the 65-year-olds and older group and all other age groups are statistically significant in all survey years.

Considering the entire period from 1999 to 2019, the 65 years and above age group shows the greatest change of all: In this age group the rate of volunteering increased by 13.2 percentage points, growing from 18.0 per cent in 1999 to 31.2 per cent in 2019. Compared to the other age groups, this group continues to exhibit the lowest rate of volunteering in 2019, just as in previous years. The highest rates of volunteering in 2019 are found in the 14–29 years age group, at 42.0 per cent, and in the 30–49 years age group, with a rate of 44.7 per cent.

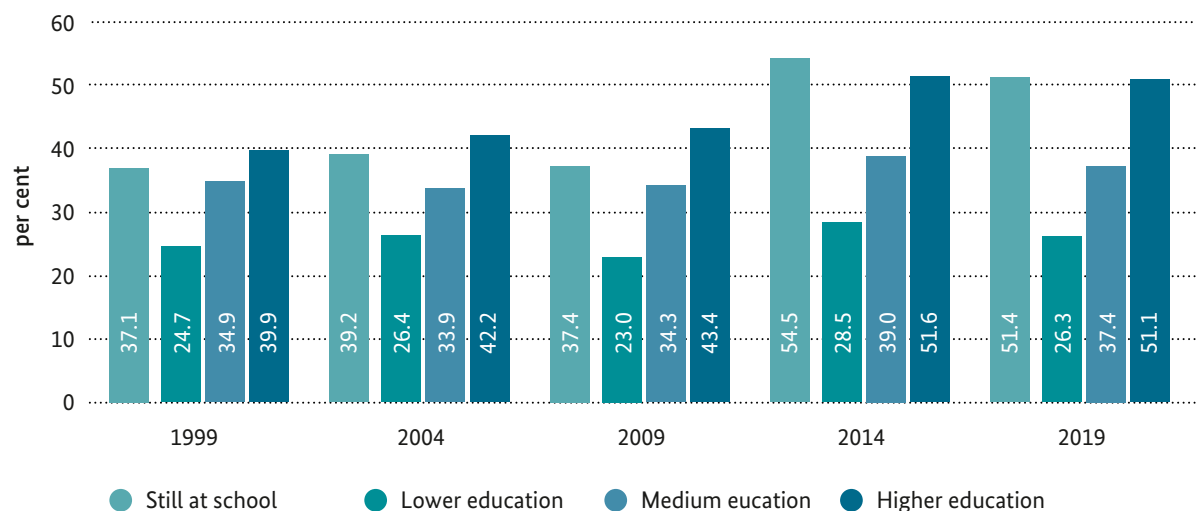
#### The differences in the rates of volunteering between the educational groups have grown over the last two decades

People with various levels of education become involved in voluntary activity to a very widely differing extent (Figure 3–3). Considering the whole of the last twenty years, one sees that the rate of volunteering has increased in all educational groups, although to a widely differing

extent: For people still in school there has been growth of 14.3 percentage points between 1999 and 2019, while people with a high level of education showed a growth of 11.2 percentage points. The growth among people with a medium level of education was weaker, at 2.5 percentage points. In the case of people with lower levels of education, the change in their rate of volunteering between 1999 and 2019 was not statistically significant. As an overall result of these differing trends among the individual groups, differences in rates of volunteering by educational attainment have increased over time.

In 2019, just over half of those still in school and just over half of those with a high level of education are engaged in voluntary commitment (Figure 3–3). Of those with a lower level of education, only a little more than a quarter are involved in voluntary commitment. The rate of volunteering of people with a medium level of education lies somewhere in between: with figures for voluntary commitment of a little over a third.

Figure 3–3: Rates of volunteering, by educational attainment, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,840), FWS 2004 (n=14,983), FWS 2009 (n=19,940), FWS 2014 (n=28,681), FWS 2019 (n=27,753).

The differences in trends are statistically significant for all educational groups (with the exception of people with low educational attainment) between the years 1999 and 2014, between 2004 and 2014 and between 2009 and 2014, as well as between 1999 and 2019, between 2004 and 2019 and between 2009 and 2019. In addition to this, in the case of people with high educational attainment, differences in trends are statistically significant between 1999 and 2004. For people with lower educational attainment, only the differences between 1999 and 2014, between 2004 and 2009, between 2009 and 2014 and between 2009 and 2019 are statistically significant.

The differences between people with low educational attainment and all other education groups, along with those between persons with medium educational attainment and those with high educational attainment are statistically significant in all survey years. The differences between those still in school and those with medium educational attainment are statistically significant in 2004, 2014 and 2019. The differences between those still in school and those with high educational attainment are statistically significant in 2009.

#### Having migrant background – and in particular having a personal experience of immigration – is a meaningful factor in volunteering

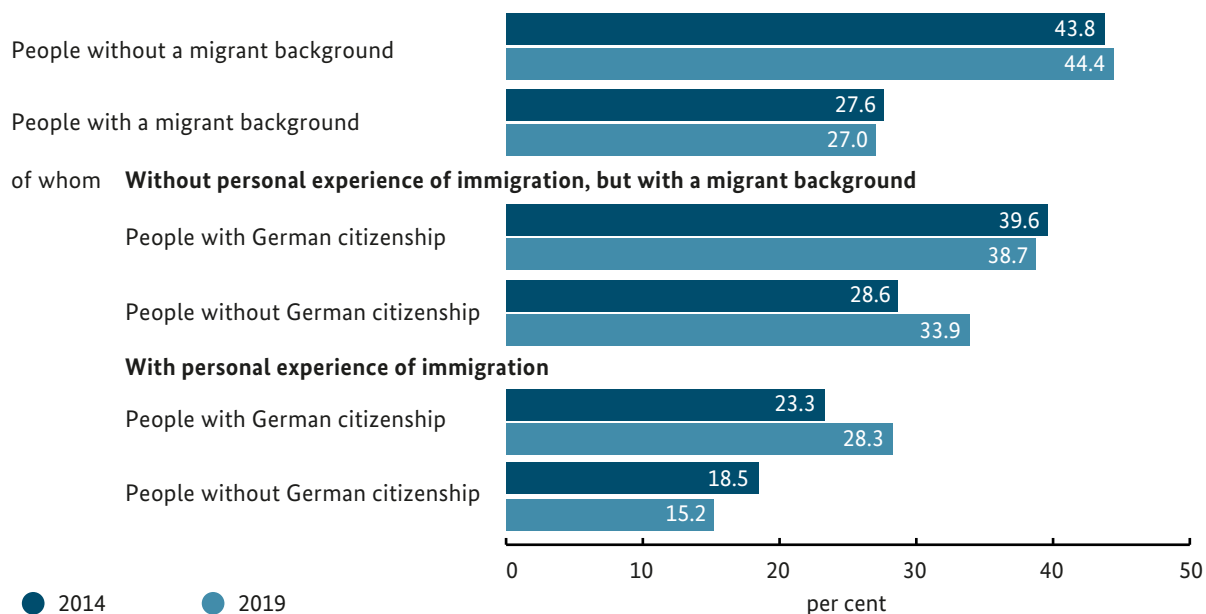
Persons with no migrant background engage in voluntary work at a rate of 44.4 per cent in 2019, a much higher rate than persons with a migration background, for whom the rate of volunteering is only 27.0 per cent (Figure 3–4). Comparing 2014 against 2019, these rates have not changed to any statistically significant extent.

Differentiating further between persons with a migrant background according to whether they personally immigrated to Germany and/or whether they possess German citizenship, it becomes apparent that people with a migrant background, but who have not personally experienced immigration and who possess German citizenship, with a figure of 38.7 per cent, differ the least in terms of their volunteering from people with no migrant background. Of people without

any personal experience of immigration and without German citizenship, 33.9 per cent volunteer in 2019. The figure for people who have both personally experienced immigration and possess German citizenship is 28.3 per cent. The lowest volunteer rate, at 15.2 per cent, is shown by people who have experienced immigration personally and have not got German citizenship.

Between 2014 and 2019, the rate of volunteering among people with personal immigration experience and with German citizenship increased from 23.3 per cent to 28.3 per cent. Among the remaining groups with a migrant background – whether or not they have personal immigration experience – no statistically significant change can be observed over time. For the subcategory of those who have no personal experience of immigration and who do not have German citizenship, this may also be due to the smaller number of cases (2014: n=280; 2019: n=190).

Figure 3–4: Rates of volunteering, by migrant background, over time, 2014–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 2014 (n = 28,359), FWS 2019 (n = 27,561).

The differences in trends are not statistically significant with the exception of people with personal experience of immigration and with German citizenship.

The differences between people without migrant background and those with migrant background are statistically significant in both survey years.

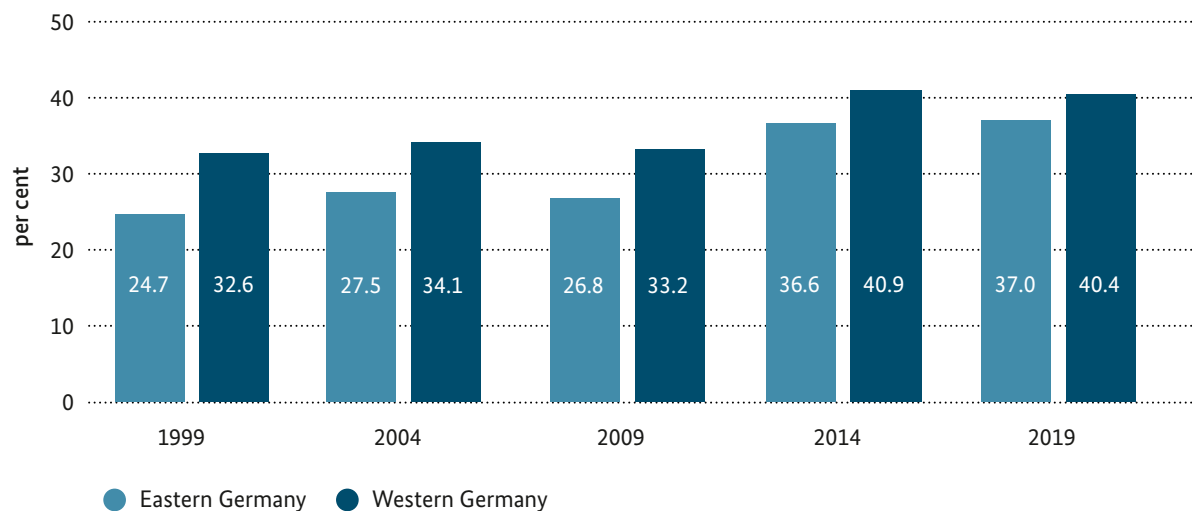
The difference between those without personal experience of immigration and without German citizenship, on the one hand, and those with personal experience of immigration possessing German citizenship, on the other, is not statistically significant in either survey year. The difference between those without personal experience of immigration and possessing German citizenship, on the one hand, and those without personal experience of immigration and without German citizenship, on the other is not statistically significant in the year 2019. All other differences between groups with migrant background are statistically significant.

**The differences between eastern and western Germany are getting smaller as time goes on, though volunteering is still more widespread in western Germany in 2019**

There is a difference in the rates of volunteering between the regions in Germany. In 2019, the rate

of volunteering in eastern Germany, at 37.0 per cent, remains lower than the figure of 40.4 per cent for western Germany, even though the two regions' respective rates have been converging gradually since 1999 (Figure 3–5). While the difference was 7.9 percentage points in 1999, it is only 3.4 percentage points in 2019.

Figure 3–5: Rates of volunteering in eastern and western Germany, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,689), FWS 2019 (n=27,759).

The differences in trends for eastern Germany are all statistically significant, with the exception of the differences between 2004 and 2009 and between 2014 and 2019. The differences in western Germany are statistically significant, with the exception of the differences between 1999 and 2004, between 1999 and 2009, between 2004 and 2009 and between 2014 and 2019.

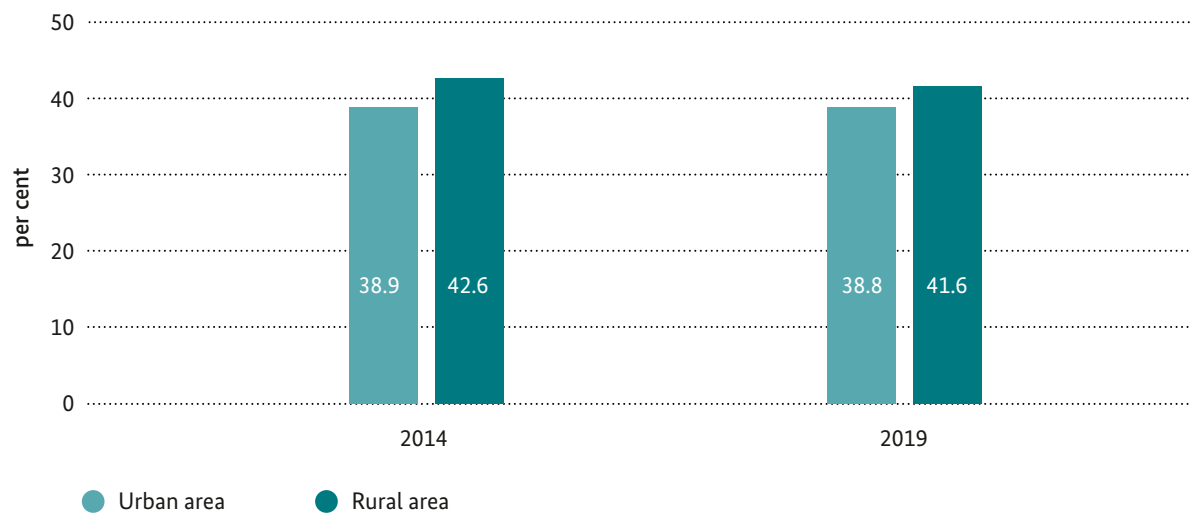
The differences between eastern and western Germany are statistically significant for all survey years.

**People living in rural areas show a higher rate of volunteering than people in urban areas**

While 41.6 per cent of people aged 14 years and above are engaged in voluntary work in rural areas in 2019, the rate in urban areas is at the slightly lower level of 38.8 per cent (Figure 3–6). This difference may be related to differences in opportunity structures and in demand for voluntary commitment in rural compared to urban areas, but may also be due to a lower level of competition for alternative leisure and participation opportunities in rural areas (Deutscher Bundestag 2017; Kleiner & Klärner 2019). There is no statistically significant difference between the figures for survey years 2014 and 2019.

### 3 Differences and Inequalities in Volunteering

Figure 3–6: Rates of volunteering by region type, over time, 2014–2019 (base: all respondents)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents who gave consent for the inclusion of regional data. FWS 2014 (n = 25,381), FWS 2019 (n = 24,074).

The differences in trends are not statistically significant.

The differences between types of region are statistically significant for both survey years.

#### Willingness to become engaged in voluntary work is high and is growing over time

Well over half of the people who are not currently involved in volunteering can imagine the prospect of getting involved in the future: In 2019, 58.7 per cent of those not currently engaged in such activity state their willingness to volunteer in the future. This figure has grown at a statistically significant rate from survey year to survey year ever since 1999. In 1999, a total of 38.7 per cent of those not currently engaged in voluntary work indicated a willingness to volunteer in the future; in 2004, the figure was 49.4 per cent; in 2009 it was 55.1 per cent; and in 2014, 56.9 per cent (data not shown).

#### Conclusion

Volunteering is an important form of participation in society. If one assumes that all population groups should possess equal opportunities in their participation in society, then, ideally, there should be no systematic group-related differences in rates of voluntary engagement. However, that is not the case. On the one hand, there are signs of convergence in the rates of volunteering shown by particular sections of the population – in 2019, for the first time, there are no statistically significant

differences between women and men in voluntary commitment, and the rates between eastern and western Germany are converging. On the other hand, one can observe an increase over time in the inequality in the level of voluntary engagement between the different educational groups. And there are still very clear differences in engagement between other population groups as well: in relation to migrant background, for example. By no means do all population groups have the same chance to participate in and contribute to society through their engagement in voluntary work.

# 4

## Societal Areas of Volunteering

Volunteers in Germany engage in a wide variety of voluntary activities. They supervise youth groups in sports clubs, for instance, provide neighbourhood assistance for the elderly, volunteer in the student council or in their school's booster club, and organise events. Many of these voluntary activities take place in extremely varied contexts. The voluntary activities of a booster club, for example, may be carried out anywhere from a primary school to an art gallery. The events organised might be anything from a competition, a summer party for the local sports club, or workshop for people with disability to an educational project.

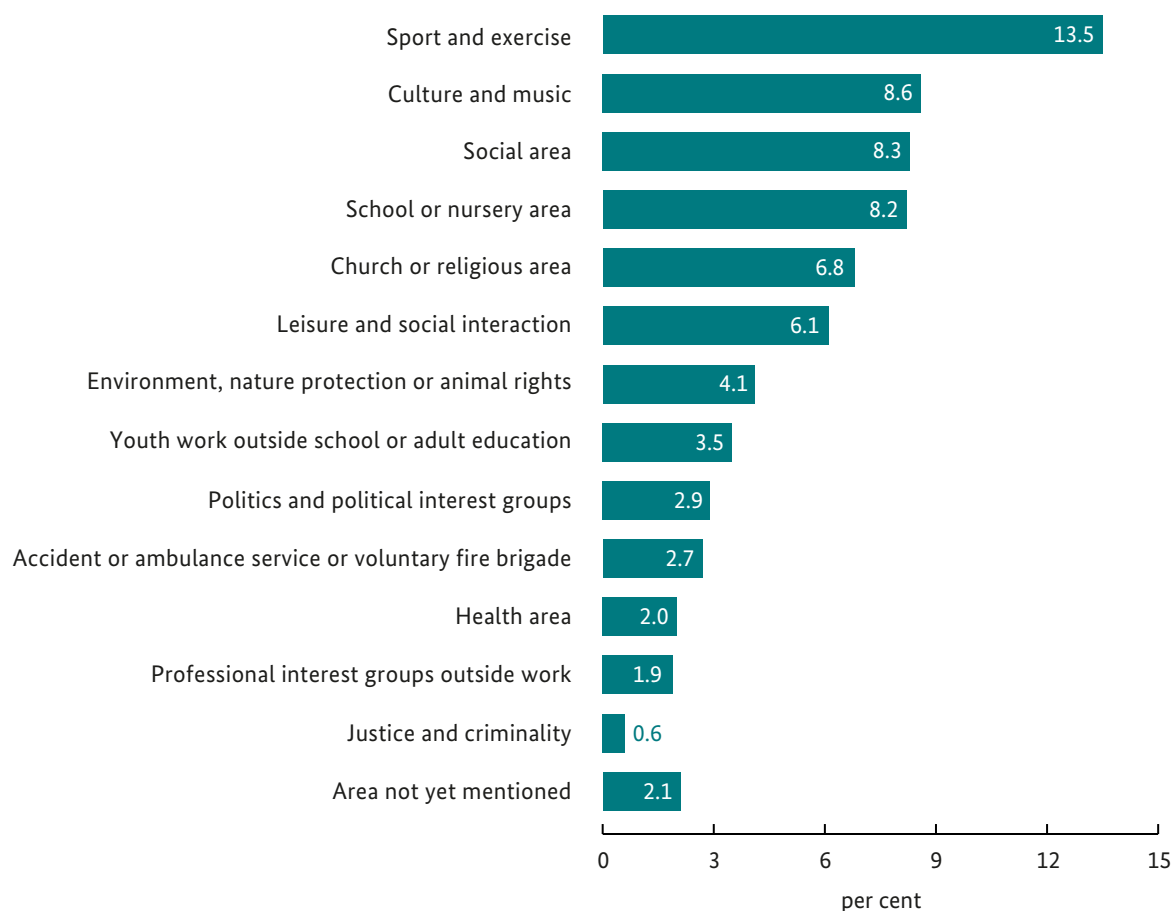
The 2019 Survey included more than 25,000 information on voluntary activities in the open-ended section. The system for classifying voluntary activities in terms of their content depends on the volunteers themselves indicating the societal areas where they engage in their voluntary activities. It should be noted, when interpreting rates of volunteering in individual areas, that respondents make an area specification for each voluntary activity they carry out, which means that area-specific rates are the result of multiple responses, and, therefore, do not add up to the total rate of volunteering. Another thing worth noting is that similar self-assessed classifications may be classified differently from individual to individual. For example, a person's activity on a social committee of the local city council might be self-assessed as either political or social, depending on the focus of the activity and the perception of the respondent.

**Voluntary engagement is found most in the areas of sport and exercise, culture and music, and in the social area**

A particularly large number of people – 13.5 per cent of the population – engage in the area of sport and exercise (Figure 4–1). This rate is roughly five percentage points larger than for the areas of culture and music, school or nursery, and in the social area, in which over eight per cent of the people in Germany are engaged. The rates for the area of church and religion, with 6.8 per cent, and in the area of leisure and social interaction, with 6.1 per cent, are somewhat lower. In 2019, 4.1 per cent of Germany's population aged 14 years and above are involved in voluntary activities for environment, nature protection or animal rights. The rates of volunteering in the areas of youth work outside school or adult education, in politics and political interest groups, as well as in the accident or ambulance service or the voluntary fire brigade, all come in at about three per cent each. Lower rates can be seen in the health area, in professional interest groups outside work and in justice and criminality; in all three categories the rate of volunteering within Germany's population is two per cent or lower.



Figure 4–1: Rates of volunteering in fourteen societal areas, 2019  
(base: all respondents; multiple responses possible)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents (n=27,762). Multiple responses possible.

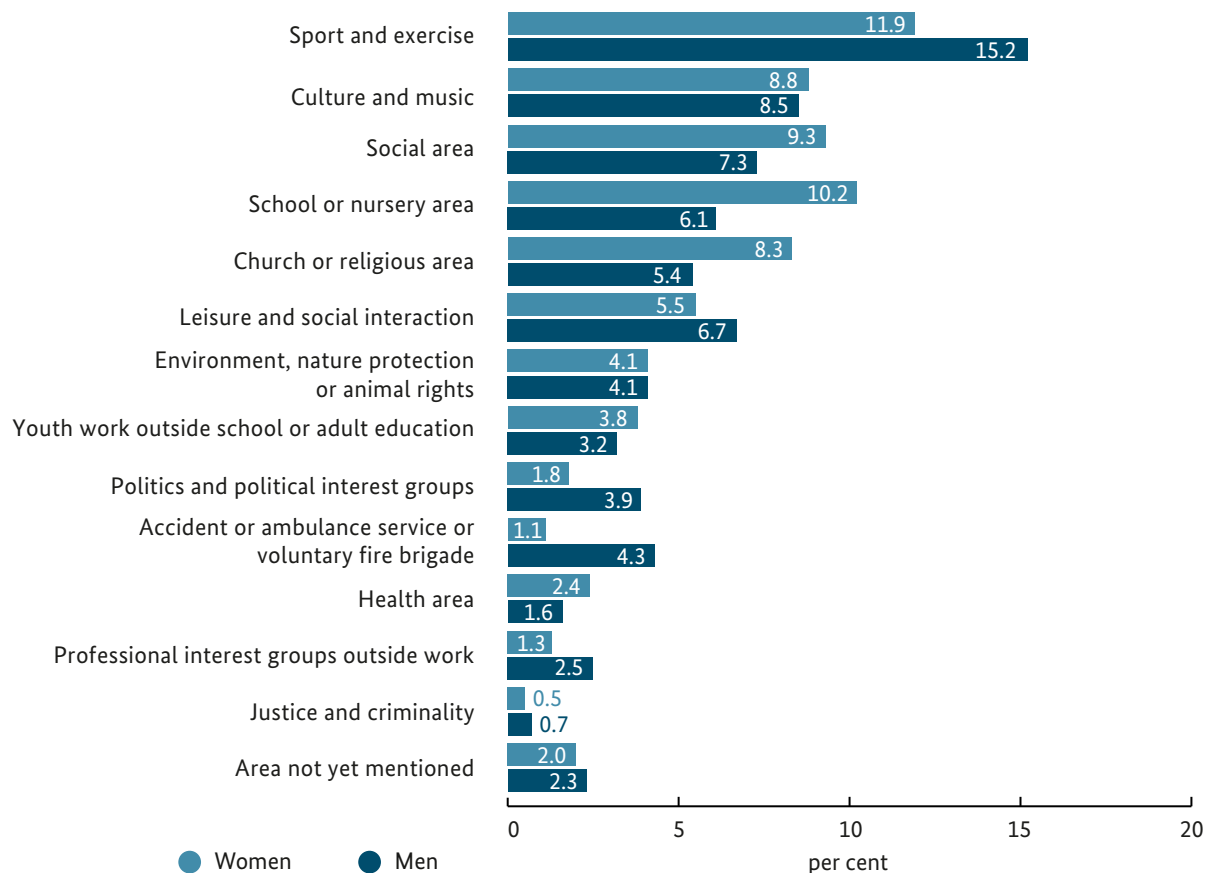
### The school or nursery area and the sport and exercise area are the two areas with the greatest differences between women and men in terms of voluntary engagement

Women and men become involved to a very different extent in the various societal areas. Women are proportionately more likely to be involved in the school or nursery area, where their rate of volunteering, at 10.2 per cent, is 4.1 percentage points higher than the rate for men (Figure 4–2). More women than men are involved in voluntary work in the church or religious area, too, and the same is true of the social area. In the health area, the difference is just 0.8 percentage points.

Both women and men are most likely to become engaged in the area of sport and exercise. Yet it is

also true that the figures for men engaged in some areas – especially in sport and exercise at 15.2 per cent, but also in the area of accident and ambulance service and the volunteer fire brigade at 4.3 percent – are more than three percentage points higher than the equivalent rates for women. In the area of politics and political interest groups too, the rate for men is a good two percentage points higher than that for women. A slightly higher rate of volunteering among men than among women continues to be seen for professional interest groups outside work, for leisure and social interaction, and for justice and criminality. Neither in the area of culture and music nor in the area of environment, nature protection or animal rights are there any statistically significant differences between the genders (Figure 4–2).

Figure 4–2: Rates of volunteering in fourteen societal areas in 2019, by gender  
(base: all respondents; multiple responses possible)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents (n=27,759). Multiple responses possible.

The gender differences are statistically significant in all areas, with the exception of those in the areas of culture and music, of environment, nature conservation and animal protection, and the "area not yet mentioned" category.

**As compared against the other age groups, people aged between 30 and 49 years are most likely to be engaged in voluntary work in the area of school or nursery**

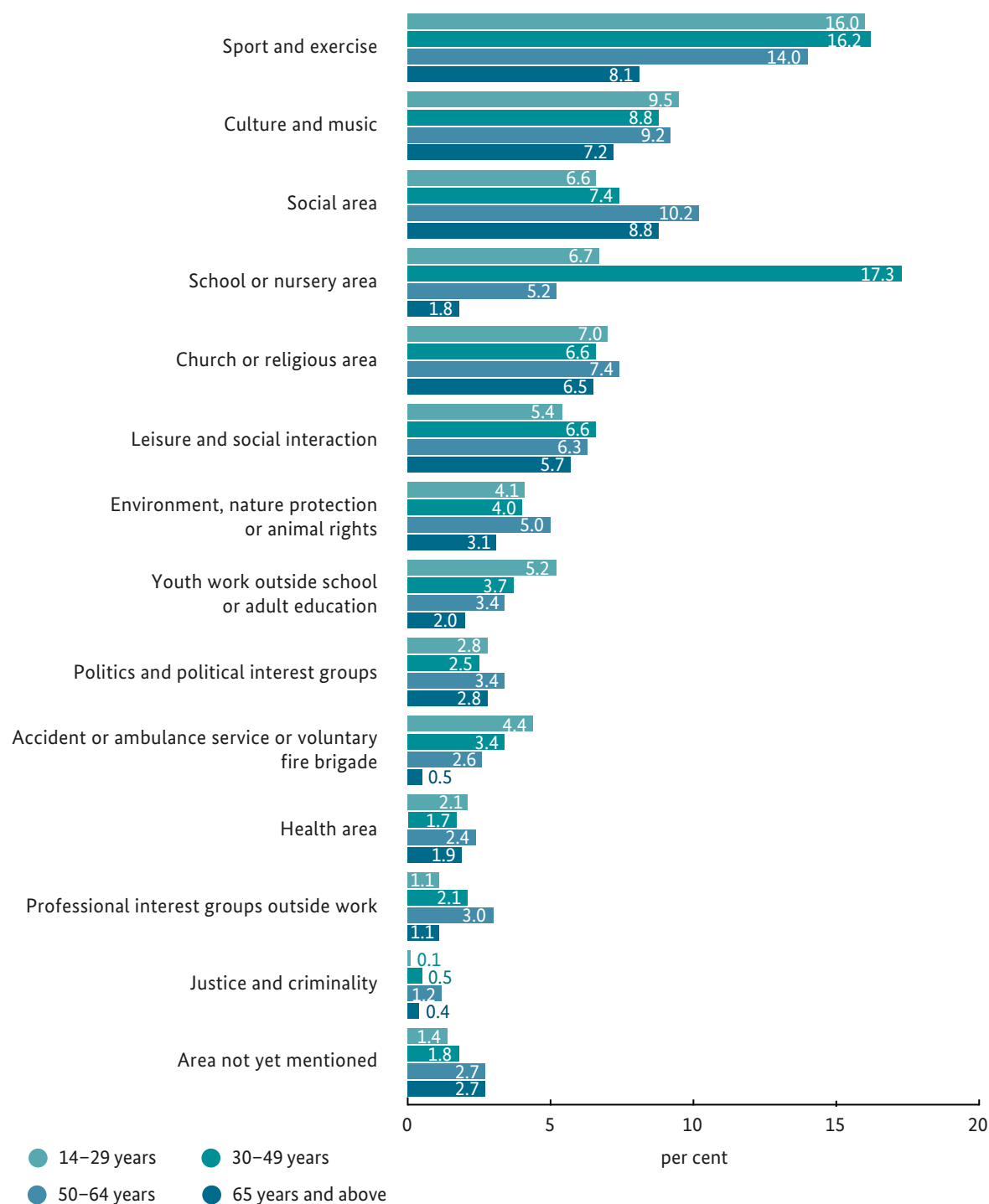
There are also age-specific features in relation to voluntary engagement in the various societal areas (Figure 4–3). Younger age groups enjoy relative dominance in the sport and exercise, youth work outside school or adult education, along with accident and ambulance service and the voluntary fire brigade: the 14- to 29-year-old and 30- to 49-year-old age groups are much more involved than the older age groups in the field of sport and exercise, as well as in the field of accident and ambulance services and voluntary fire brigades. Something that stands out in the area of youth work outside school or adult education, is the strong involvement of the very youngest age

group (14 to 29 years). Another particularly striking feature is the proportion of 30- to 49-year-olds involved in the school and nursery area. Their rate of volunteering, at 17.3 per cent, is twice as high as it is for the other age groups.

In the social area, on the other hand, people aged 50 years and above – that is to say the two older groups – are proportionately more likely to volunteer than the two younger age groups. In addition, the 50- to 64-year-olds group is more frequently involved in professional interest groups outside work and in justice and criminality than the other age groups considered here. Only minor differences between the age groups can be discerned in the areas of church and religion, culture and music, and leisure and social interaction.

## 4 Societal Areas of Volunteering

Figure 4–3: Rates of volunteering in fourteen societal areas in 2019, by age  
(base: all respondents; multiple responses possible)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents (n=27,762). Multiple responses possible.

**Sport and exercise:** No statistically significant difference can be seen between the 14–29 and the 30–49 age groups. **Culture and music:** The only statistically significant difference is between the 65 and above age group and the other three age groups. **Social area:** No statistically significant difference can be seen between the 14–29 and the 30–49 age groups. **School or nursery area:** All differences are statistically significant. **The church or religious area and the area leisure and social interaction:** No statistically significant differences. **Environment, nature protection and animal rights:** There are statistically significant differences between the 50–64 and the 65 and above age groups as well as between both these two groups and the 30–49 age group. **Youth work outside school or adult education:** No statistically significant difference can be seen between the 30–49 and the 50–64 age groups. **Politics and political interest groups:** A statistically significant difference can be seen only between the 30–49 and the 50–64 age groups. **Accident or ambulance service or voluntary fire brigade:** No statistically significant difference can be seen between the 14–29 and the 30–49 age groups. **Health area:** A statistically significant difference can be seen only between the 30–49 and the 50–64 age groups. **Professional interest groups outside work:** There is no statistically significant difference between the 14–29 and the 65 and above age groups. **Justice and criminality:** No statistically significant difference can be seen between the 30–49 and the 65 and above age groups. **Area not yet mentioned:** No statistically significant difference can be seen between the 14–29 and the 30–49 age groups, nor between the 50–64 and the 65 and older group.

### Conclusion

The rates of volunteering in each area reflect not just the areas of interest of volunteers, but also, for example, the demand for volunteers and the number of organisations in the relevant area.

Differences can be seen between women and men in terms of their involvement in societal areas. These differences may be rooted in the patterns of gender-specific division of labour that still exist in our society. For example, women are more likely than men to be involved in areas that might be characterised as family-related or social. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more involved than women in politics and in accident and ambulance services, and the voluntary fire brigade.

Involvement in certain specific societal areas also has a relationship with a person's stage of life and with the interests, tasks and opportunities associated with that stage (Blinkert & Klie 2017; Vogel et alia 2017). For example, many people between the ages of 30 and 49 years have younger children, who can provide a starting point for taking on voluntary activities for schools, nursery and even sports clubs.

# 5

## Volunteering for Refugees

Against the backdrop of the increased arrival of refugees that occurred in 2015 and 2016, voluntary engagement with refugees has been a particular focus of public discourse over recent years. Voluntary engagement for refugees and asylum seekers can be an essential element of social integration (Diaby 2016; Han-Broich 2015). The 2019 Survey on Volunteering can be useful in mapping the ways in which voluntary commitment and willingness to help refugees has evolved in Germany since 2014.

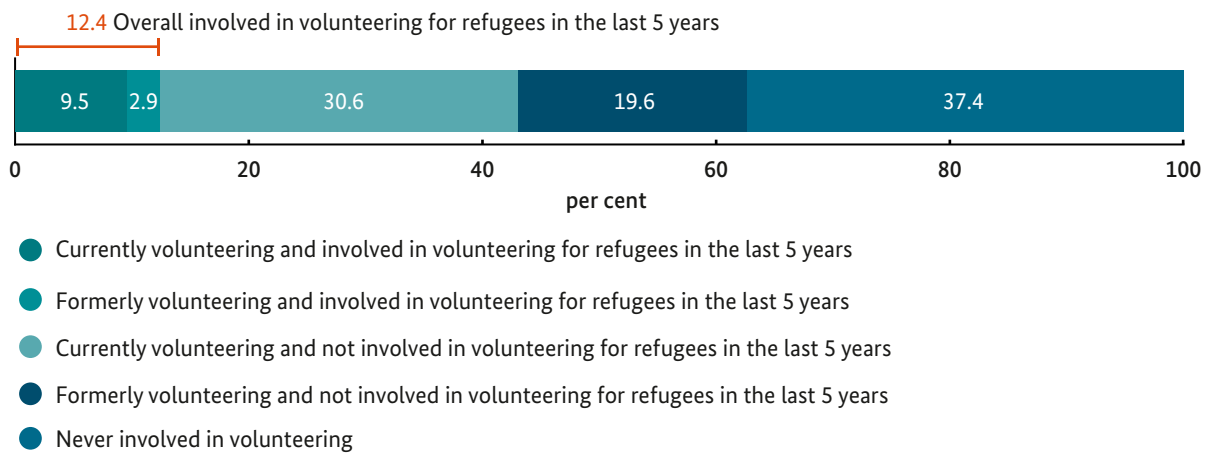
Voluntary engagement for refugees is recorded in a variety of ways in the 2019 Survey: For one thing, it provides retrospective information on whether respondents have volunteered for refugees in the last five years (from 2014 to 2019). To this end, both people engaged and those not engaged in voluntary activity in 2019 are asked whether they have done voluntary work for refugees and asylum seekers at any time over the last five years; that is to say since the beginning of 2014. For another, the survey can show the figures on people whose voluntary activity (or, in the case of volunteers undertaking more than one voluntary activity, the most time-consuming of those activities) is directed towards refugees and asylum seekers in 2019. For this purpose, volunteers in 2019 are asked whether their voluntary activity is targeted at refugees and asylum seekers.

### **More than one in ten people aged 14 years and above have volunteered for refugees and asylum seekers over the last five years**

Looking retrospectively at voluntary engagement for refugees between 2014 and 2019, a total of 12.4 per cent of people aged 14 years and above living in Germany became engaged for refugees and asylum seekers during that period. This voluntary engagement may consist of a single on-going and time-intensive voluntary commitment, in a variety of voluntary activities at different times or even just a single one-off voluntary activity involving a less substantial time commitment.

Figure 5–1 shows the rate of volunteering for refugees in the last five years from 2014 to 2019, differentiated by current voluntary engagement status, that is, according to whether people are engaged in any voluntary work in 2019 or are no longer volunteering, although they have been engaged in voluntary work previously. Of people aged 14 and above, 9.5 per cent are involved in volunteering in 2019 and have done volunteer work for refugees in the period from 2014 to 2019. A further 2.9 per cent of the population is no longer involved in volunteering in 2019, but has done volunteer work for refugees at some time in the five years from 2014 onwards.

Figure 5–1: Volunteering for refugees in the last five years, by current voluntary engagement status (base: all respondents)



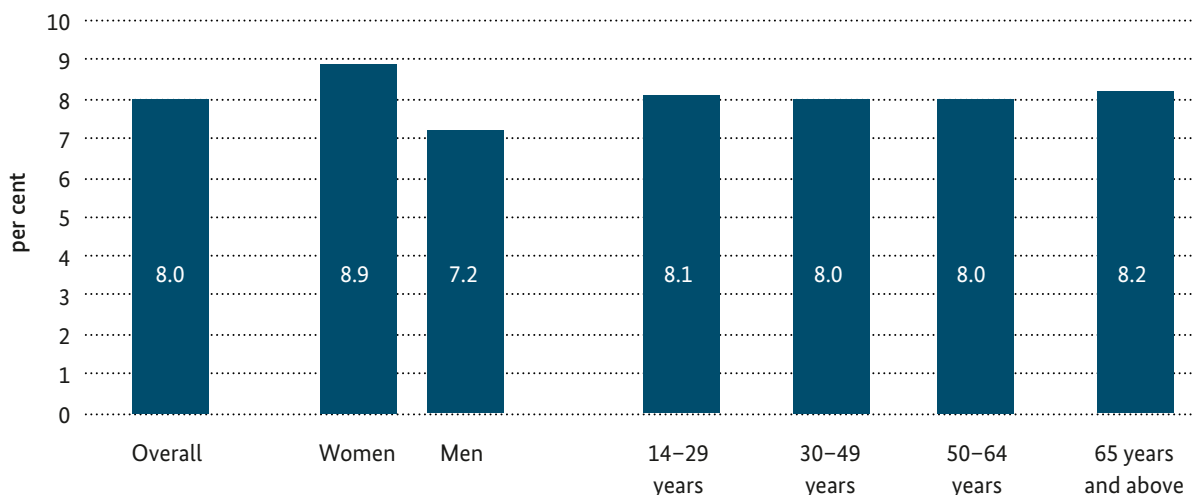
Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all respondents (n=27,469).

#### In 2019, eight per cent of volunteers are involved in voluntary activities for refugees and asylum seekers

People who reported being involved in voluntary work in 2019 are asked by the survey about the target groups of their voluntary activity. One of the target groups covered by the survey is that of refugees and asylum seekers. In 2019, 8.0 per cent of people with voluntary engagement in 2019 state that the target group of their voluntary activity is refugees and asylum seekers (Figure 5–2).

At 8.9 per cent, the figure of voluntarily engaged women currently volunteering for this group is higher than for men, for whom the figure is 7.2 per cent (Figure 5–2). This difference is statistically significant. One cannot find any statistically significant differences in the breakdown by age group of the figures for volunteering for this target group. Among 14- to 29-year-olds, 8.1 per cent are involved with refugees, among 30- to 49-year-olds and 50- to 64-year-olds the figure is 8.0 per cent in both cases, and among those aged 65 years and above, the figure is 8.2 per cent.

Figure 5–2: Proportions of volunteers who report refugees and asylum seekers as a target group for their voluntary work in 2019, overall, by gender and age (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers (n=11,780).

The difference between the genders is statistically significant. There is no statistically significant difference between the various age groups.

### Conclusion

A good twelve per cent of people in Germany became involved in some voluntary activity to help refugees or asylum seekers in the years between 2014 and 2019. That figure provides an insight into how the political and social situation in this period of increased arrival of refugees seems to have contributed to the increase in the number of people who became involved in work with refugees to help facilitate their arrival in Germany. When looking at the figures for volunteering for refugees by current voluntary engagement status, the following picture emerges: Over nine per cent are currently still engaged in voluntary work and have become involved in voluntary work for refugees between 2014 and 2019. Almost three per cent are no longer involved in voluntary work, but have been involved in voluntary work with refugees during the period from 2014 to 2019.

In 2019, around eight per cent of all those currently involved in voluntary activity are doing so for the sake of refugees and asylum seekers. The open-ended answers given by those volunteers who have described their voluntary activity for refugees do much to illustrate the wide range of activities that they are involved in. For example, many volunteers provide support for refugees in their dealings with the authorities and in their integration into the labour market; they also offer routine everyday support and teach them the German language. In other activities, however, voluntary commitment is not exclusively aimed at refugees. Rather, it includes them along with other target groups, for example in various leisure activities.

# 6

## Time Spent on Voluntary Activity

Time is an essential component when considering how voluntary activity takes shape. Time is a scarce commodity – everyone has only a limited amount of time available to them to dedicate to their volunteering and other activities. Every individual's time budget will vary according to their phase of life and life circumstances. Thus, women and men, and people in different age groups and of different educational backgrounds will tend to engage in their voluntary activities with varying amounts of time commitment (Hameister et alia 2017). Furthermore, societal changes, such as increased participation in the labour force, impact on the size and distribution of time budgets (Burkhardt et alia 2017).

### **The trend towards a reduction in time commitment to the voluntary activity has continued up until 2019**

When comparing the survey waves, one can observe a tendency for volunteer's activity (or the most time-consuming activity for those undertaking more than one voluntary activity) to become less time-intensive. The figure for volunteers spending up to two hours a week on their voluntary activity has increased from 50.8 per cent to 60.0 per cent between 1999 and 2019 (Figure 6–1). During the same period of time, the figure for volunteers devoting six or more hours per week to their voluntary activity has fallen from 23.0 per cent to 17.1 per cent. In the period between the 2014 and 2019 survey waves, the figure for people spending up to two hours a week on their voluntary activity has increased by more than two per-

centage points and the number of people spending six or more hours a week on their voluntary activity decreased by one and a half percentage points.

### **Male volunteers and older volunteers commit particularly large amounts of time to their voluntary activity**

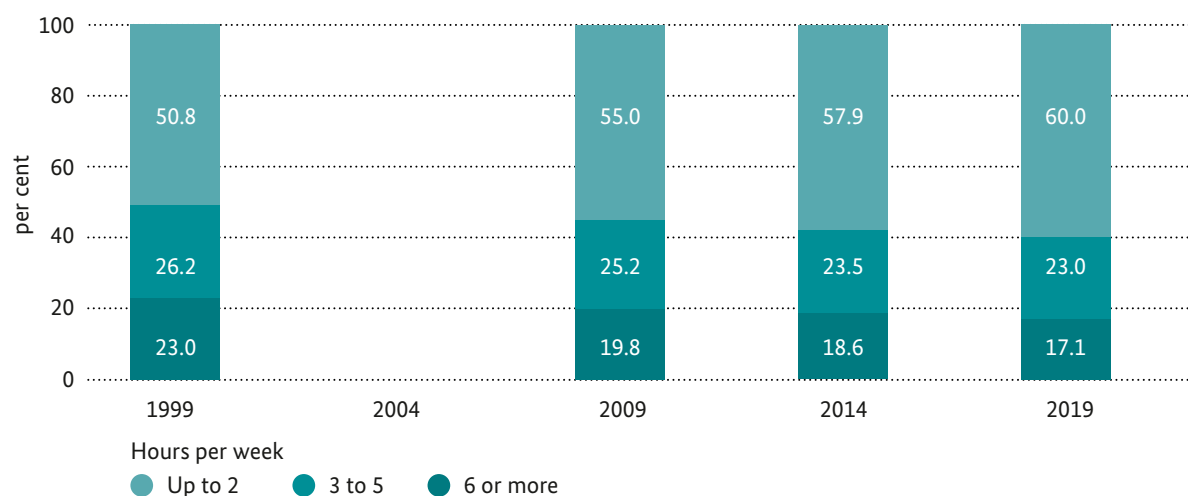
Men tend to spend more time on their voluntary activities than women (Figure 6–2). In 2019, almost one fifth (19.6 per cent) of men who do voluntary work dedicate six hours or more per week to their voluntary activity. Among voluntarily engaged women, the proportion of those who spend six or more hours on their voluntary activity is lower at 14.5 per cent.

Comparing the age groups against one another (Figure 6–2), it stands out that those aged 65 years and above provide the highest figures (at 22.2 per cent) for volunteers spending six or more hours per week on their voluntary activity in 2019. In contrast, only 13.2 per cent of 30- to 49-year-old volunteers spend six or more hours a week on their voluntary activity. This age group has the highest figure, at 66.9 per cent, for dedicating two hours or less a week to their voluntary activity. It can be seen that the proportion of volunteers who do time-intensive voluntary work is particularly low in the 30–49 years age group. In the 14–29 years age group, the figure for voluntary activity of six or more hours per week, at 15.8 per cent, is slightly higher.



## 6 Time Spent on Voluntary Activity

Figure 6–1: Hours of voluntary activity done per week, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers. FWS 1999 (n=4,440), FWS 2009 (n=6,740), FWS 2014 (n=11,799), FWS 2019 (n=11,237). In 2004, time commitment was not recorded.

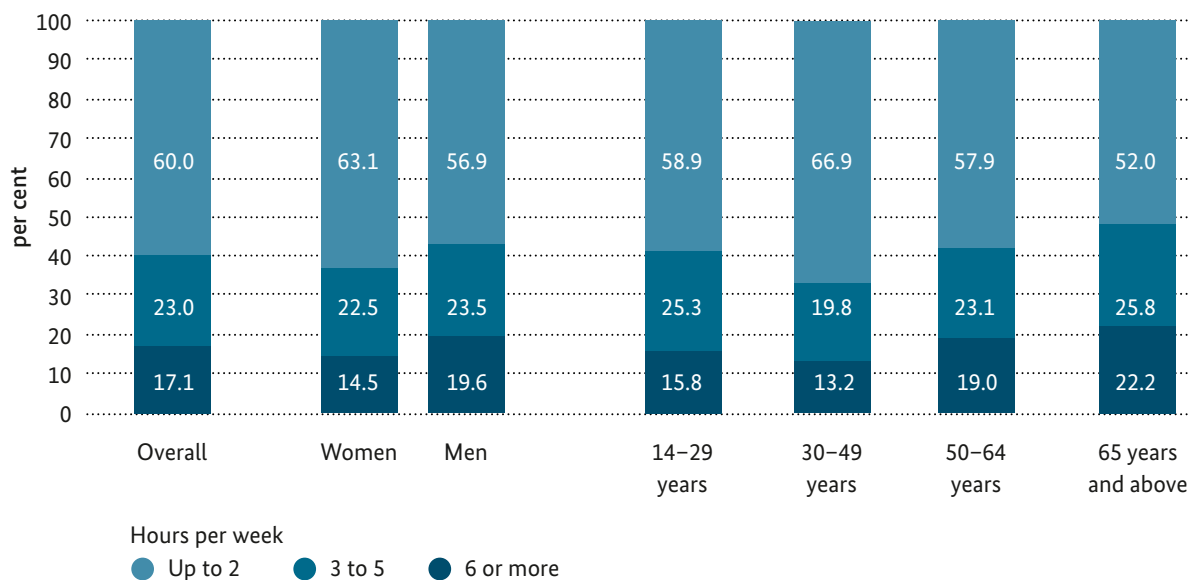
Note: Deviations in percentage values are due to rounding.

The 'Up to 2 hours per week' category: All differences in the analysis over time are statistically significant.

The '3 to 5 hours per week' category: The differences between 1999 and 2014, between 1999 and 2019 and between 2009 and 2019 are statistically significant.

The '6 hours or more per week' category: The differences between 1999 and all other survey years, between 2009 and 2019 and between 2014 and 2019, are statistically significant.

Figure 6–2: Hours of voluntary activity done per week in 2019, overall, by gender and by age (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers (n=11,237).

Note: Deviations in percentage values are due to rounding.

The 'Up to 2 hours per week' category: The gender difference is statistically significant, as are all the age group differences, with the exception of the difference between 14- to 29-year-olds and 50- to 64-year-olds.

The '3 to 5 hours per week' category: The difference between the genders is not statistically significant; the differences between the age groups are all statistically significant, with the exception of the differences between 14- to 29-year-olds and the two oldest age groups as well as between 50- to 64-year-olds and the 65 years and above age group.

The '6 or more per week' category: The gender difference is statistically significant; the differences between age groups are all statistically significant, with the exception of the difference between 14- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 49-year-olds as well as between 14- to 29-year-olds and 50- to 64-year-olds.

### Conclusion

Looking at the development over time, there has been an ongoing trend since 1999 towards less time-intensive voluntary activity. It may be that this trend can also be attributed to a change in the way people use their time: Greater investment of time in various areas of everyday life, such as in paid employment or family life, reduces the amount of time available for other activities, including volunteering.

The amount of time spent on voluntary activity also differs between women and men as well as between age groups. Women are less likely to spend a large amount of time on their voluntary activity than men. This difference is probably related to the mechanisms of gender-specific division of labour. Older volunteers are more likely to spend a large amount of time on their voluntary activity than younger and middle-aged volunteers. This may be related to differing time budgets available to the various groups for voluntary activity – due, for example, to differing levels of involvement in family tasks and in paid employment – but it may also have to do with differing preferences in relation to how one organises one's time.

# 7

## Management or Board Positions in Voluntary Activity

Many volunteers take on a special level of responsibility by assuming a leadership role in their voluntary work. These positions involve a high level of commitment and a substantial time investment. From the perspective of the relevant voluntary organisations, these features of such roles mean that it is not always easy to recruit volunteers for management or board activities (Alscher et alia 2018). Ever since the first wave in 1999, all volunteers have been asked in the Survey on Volunteering whether they take on any management or board position within their voluntary activity (or, in the case of volunteers doing more than one voluntary activity, within their most time-consuming voluntary activity).

### **The figures for volunteers who take on management or board positions have been declining since 1999**

In 2019, 26.3 per cent of volunteers hold down a management or board position as part of their voluntary activity. These rates have not changed to any statistically significant extent between 2014 and 2019. The figure for volunteers who exercise a leadership role has fallen by over ten percentage points over the last twenty years, from 36.8 per cent in 1999 to 26.3 per cent in 2019 (Figure 7-1). The size of the decline varies between survey waves. In particular, the figures for volunteers holding a management or board position fell quite sharply between 1999 and 2004 (by 3.6 percentage points) and between 2009 and 2014 (by 3.9 percentage points).

This decrease in the rate at which volunteers exercised management or board positions is partly due to the fact that absolute numbers of volunteers have increased overall since 1999 and at the same time, the number of people not exercising leadership roles in their voluntary activity has increased by more than the number of people with such positions. In particular, the figure for voluntary activities in informal settings has risen sharply, where there are fewer management or board positions than in formal bodies such as clubs.

### **Management or board positions are held particularly often by men and older volunteers**

Among volunteers, there are clear differences between women and men and between different age groups in relation to exercising management or board positions. With a figure of 30.5 per cent, men are significantly more likely to exercise a leadership role than women with 22.1 per cent (Figure 7-2).

Comparing age groups, it is noticeable that those in the two older age groups, over 50 years of age, are more likely to exercise management or board positions than those in the two younger age groups (of those between 14 and 49 years) (Figure 7-2). The proportion of volunteers engaging in management or board activities is highest in the two age groups above 50, at just under 30 per cent each. Rates do not differ between those aged 50–64 years and those aged 65 years and above.

Neither do the two younger age groups, including 14- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 49-year-olds, show any statistically significant difference from one

another in relation to their tendency to exercise leadership roles.

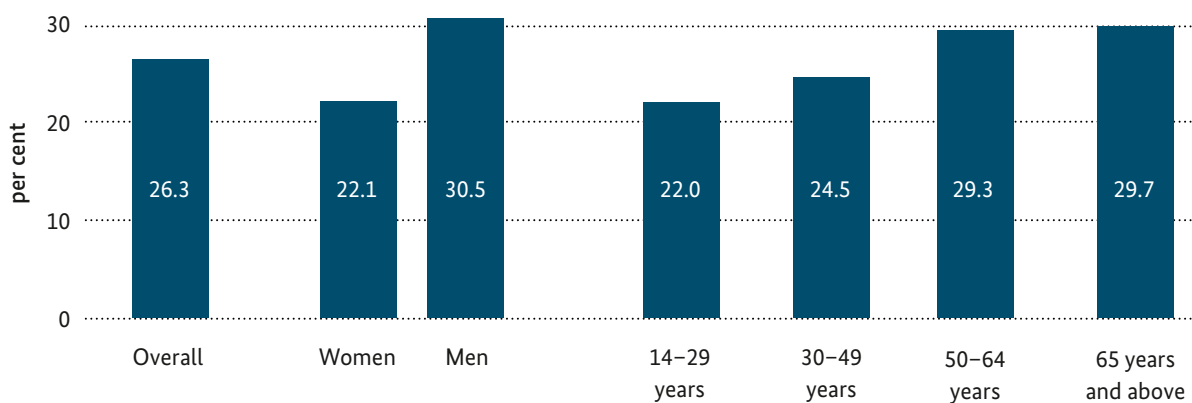
Figure 7-1: Rate of involvement in management or board positions in voluntary activity, over time, 1999–2019 (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers. FWS 1999 (n=4,677), FWS 2004 (n=5,134), FWS 2009 (n=6,996), FWS 2014 (n=12,409), FWS 2019 (n=11,917).

The differences are all statistically significant, with the exception of those between 2004 and 2009 and between 2014 and 2019.

Figure 7-2: Rate of involvement in management or board positions in voluntary activity in 2019, overall, by gender and age (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers (n=11,917).

The difference between the genders is statistically significant.

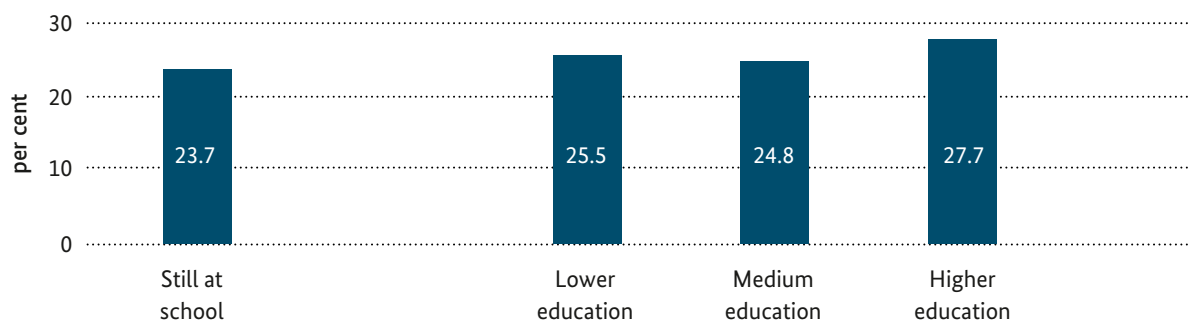
The age group differences are statistically significant, with the exception of the differences between 14- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 49-year-olds, as well as between 50- to 64-year-olds and 65-year-olds and older.

### Volunteers from the various educational attainment groups tend to exercise management or board positions in similar proportions

Management or board activities tend to be taken on slightly more frequently by volunteers with higher level of education than by volunteers in the middle group in terms of school education (Figure 7–3). Of people with a higher level of school education, 27.7 per cent exercise a leadership role, as against the 24.8 per cent for those

with an intermediate level. Volunteers with a lower level of school education and those still attending school also take on management or board positions in their voluntary activities, with about a quarter of each group doing so. The fact that the differences between those still in school and the other education groups are not statistically significant may also be a result of the comparatively small number of cases in that group (n = 340).

Figure 7–3: Rate of involvement in management or board positions in voluntary activity in 2019, by educational attainment (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers (n=11,916).

The difference between volunteers with high educational attainment and those with medium-level school education is statistically significant.

### Conclusion

The proportion of volunteers holding management or board positions has been declining since 1999. Against a background of voluntary organisations often depending on people taking on leadership functions on a voluntary basis (Zimmer 2011), the results of the Survey on Volunteering highlight an issue that is also mentioned by the relevant actors within organisations of civil society: The increasing difficulty that such groups are experiencing in recruiting people for voluntary leadership positions.

There are only minor differences between volunteers of the different educational groups in relation to exercising leadership roles. However, management or board functions in voluntary activity tend to be exercised proportionally more often by men than by women and by older than by younger people engaged in volunteering. It may be assumed that the weaker tendency among younger and middle-aged volunteers in particular to exercise leadership functions is due to the amount of time they spend dealing with their work and family commitments, a consideration that probably applies to women even more than to men as a result of gender-specific division of labour within the family and at work.

# 8

## Usage of the Internet for Voluntary Activity

The digital transformation represents one of the central societal trends of the 21st century. Digital information and communication technologies are gaining importance in almost all areas of public and private life. In the field of voluntary work, too, the possibilities opened up by the transformation are also being exploited. In many cases, the digitisation of volunteering involves providing support for voluntary activities in 'analogue' form, for example, communication of appointments by the exercise instructor in a sports club via email. At the same time, the digitalisation of volunteering may also include entirely new forms of voluntary work. These new forms are highlighted through the use of buzzwords such as 'volunteering 4.0', 'digital volunteering' or 'online volunteering' (Deutscher Bundestag 2020; Heinze et alia 2019; Hinz et alia 2014). In this context, voluntary activity takes place exclusively or predominantly on the internet.

### **A large proportion of volunteers are using the internet as part of their voluntary activity**

When the Survey on Volunteering was conducted for the first time in 1999, no question was asked on use of the internet in voluntary activity. It was not until the data from the second survey wave in 2004 came in that it became possible to make statements about the importance of the internet for volunteering (Figure 8-1). Accordingly, in 2004, 39.2 per cent of volunteers made use of the internet in their voluntary activity (or, in the case where they had more than one voluntary activity, in their most time-consuming one). There was a significant increase between 2004 and 2009 in the

rate at which volunteers used the internet in their voluntary activity. The relevant rate rose by 16.6 percentage points, from 39.2 per cent to 55.8 per cent. Since then, the use of the internet in voluntary activity has not shown any increase: The rates at which volunteers use the internet for their voluntary activity were 55.7 per cent in 2014 and 57.0 per cent in 2019.

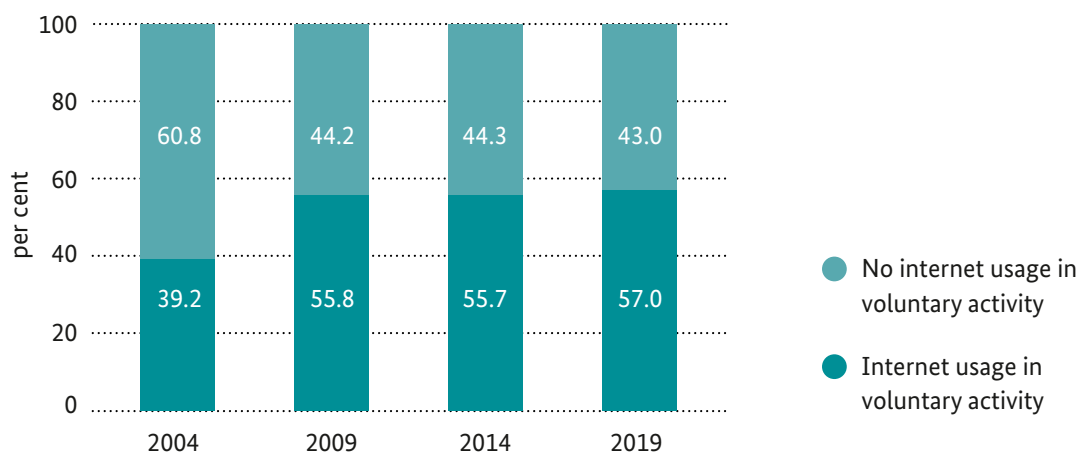
However, this also means that a substantial section of the volunteers do not use the internet for their voluntary activity. In 2004, 60.8 per cent of volunteers were in this category. That figure sunk to 44.2 per cent by 2009, and has not altered to a statistically significant extent since then. In 2019, 43.0 per cent of volunteers indicate they do not use the internet for their voluntary activity (Figure 8-1).

### **In 2019, a small number of volunteers indicate that their voluntary activity is undertaken predominantly or exclusively via the internet**

A few volunteers indicate that their voluntary activity takes place predominantly or exclusively on the internet: This group makes up 2.6 per cent of all volunteers in both 2014 and 2019 (Figure 8-2). It can be seen that purely 'internet-based volunteering' is undertaken by a small proportion of volunteers. The majority of volunteers indicate that their voluntary activity is done in part via the internet (in 2014: 52.7 per cent; in 2019: 53.6 per cent). Thus, for the majority of volunteers who use the internet in their voluntary activity, the internet plays a supportive role in that voluntary activity.

## 8 Usage of the Internet for Voluntary Activity

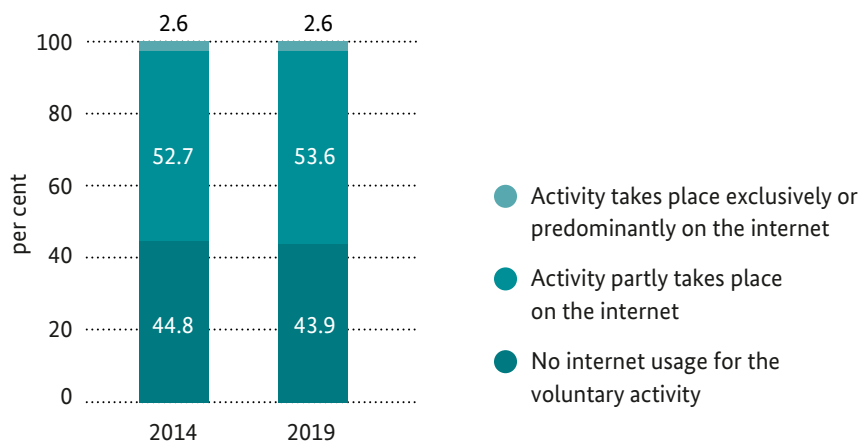
Figure 8–1: Proportion of volunteers who use the internet for their voluntary activity, over time, 2004–2019 (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers. FWS 2004 (n=5,141), FWS 2009 (n=7,001), FWS 2014 (n=12,421), FWS 2019 (n=11,925). Internet usage in voluntary activity was not recorded in 1999.

2004 differs to a statistically significant extent from 2009, 2014 and 2019. The figures for 2009, 2014 and 2019 do not differ from one another to any statistically significant extent.

Figure 8–2: Intensity of internet usage for voluntary activity, over time, 2014–2019 (base: all volunteers)



Source: FWS, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers. FWS 2014 (n = 12,253), FWS 2019 (n = 11,651).

Note: Deviations in percentage values are due to rounding. Differences to other figures result from missing values. The differences between 2014 and 2019 are not statistically significant.

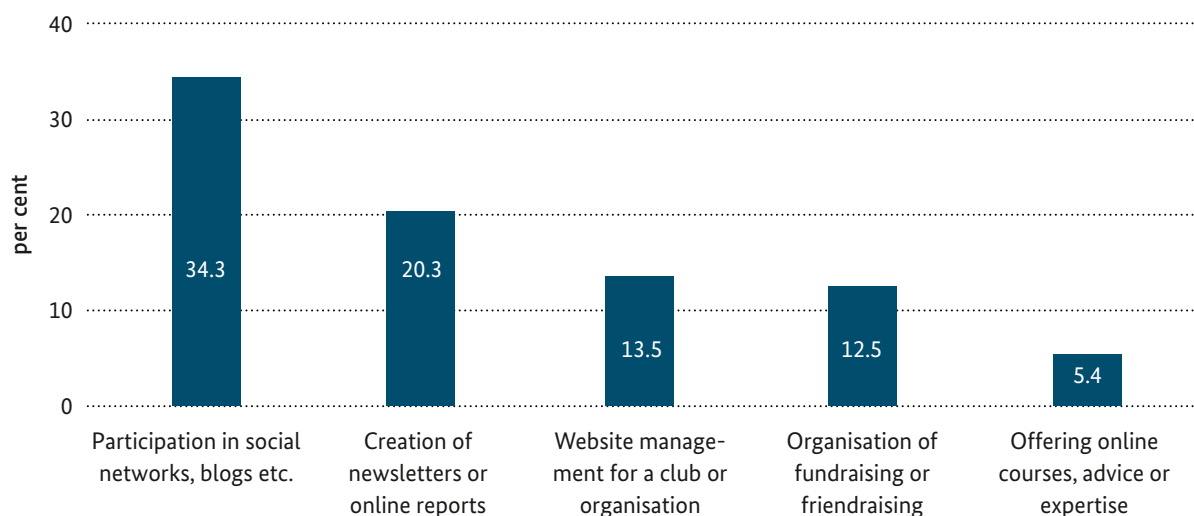
### Many volunteers use the internet in an active and creative way for their voluntary activity

The internet offers a wide variety of forms of use for volunteers. In the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, volunteers who use the internet in their voluntary activity were questioned on five different forms of active and creative internet use: Participation in social networks or blogs, the creation of newsletters or online reports, website management, fundraising or friendraising as well as offering courses, advice or expertise.

Among all these active creative forms of internet usage, participating in social networks and blogs is

the category most frequently mentioned. Of all volunteers who use the internet in their voluntary activity, 34.3 per cent indicate that they use the internet in this way for said voluntary activity (Figure 8–3). The second most frequently mentioned form of usage is the creation of newsletters and online reports. Of all volunteers who use the internet, 20.3 per cent consider such work to be part of their voluntary activity; 13.5 per cent manage their organisation’s website and 12.5 per cent use the internet to attract donations and members. The smallest figure, at 5.4 per cent, is for those who use the internet to offer courses or advice.

Figure 8–3: Proportion of volunteers who use the internet in the indicated forms in their voluntary activity, 2019 (base: all volunteers who use the internet; multiple responses possible)



Source: FWS 2019, weighted, own calculations (DZA). Base: all volunteers who use the internet ( $n = 7,253-7,263$ ). Multiple responses possible.

In relation to these findings, it should be noted that slightly more than half of the volunteers who use the internet for their voluntary activity mention at least one of the five named active creative forms of internet use (53.9 per cent, not shown). The remaining 46.1 per cent, while they

use the internet in their voluntary activity, do not use it for any of the five forms of usage listed. It is possible that they use the internet in their voluntary activity in some other way; for example, for sending emails or in searches for information.



### Conclusion

More than half (57.0 per cent) of the volunteers use the internet as part of their voluntary activity. A good half of those volunteers who used the internet, do so in active and creative ways, such as participating in social networks and blogs, creating newsletters and online reports or managing their organisation's website. A very small number of volunteers indicate that their voluntary activity is undertaken predominantly or exclusively via the internet. Digital technologies, thus, play a role for many volunteers in their voluntary activities, but mainly a supporting one.

It is also clear that 43.0 per cent of volunteers do not use the internet at all for their voluntary activity. Given the widespread assumption that the digital transformation is permeating all areas of society, this is quite a high value. It is possible that this figure is accounted for by voluntary activities that have less need for digital tools. However, it is also possible that volunteers do not (or no longer) perceive certain forms of internet usage, including such modes as messenger services, to constitute internet usage and, therefore, do not report them as such.

Overall, the results show that the internet often plays an important role in volunteering, but that there are also areas of volunteering where opportunities offered by the internet are yet to be discovered and exploited.

# 9

## Conclusions and Outlook

### Rates of involvement in volunteering

The 2019 Survey on Volunteering reveals that 39.7 per cent of German residents of 14 years or older engage in volunteering. The rate of people engaged in voluntary work has grown over the last two decades. The rates of volunteering and projections are lower than those recorded in previous reports due to the inclusion of school education as a weighting factor for all survey waves. The new figures, however, represent the ratio in the overall population more accurately than the previous ones. In relation to the evolution in rates of volunteering, two plateaus can be identified: a plateau from 1999 to 2009 (with rates roughly between 31 per cent and 33 per cent) and another between 2014 and 2019 (with rates of around 40 per cent). Between these plateaus – that is between 2009 and 2014 – a clear increase in the rate of volunteering can be observed. But are these findings mainly the result of methodological changes or do they reflect an actual change in volunteering?

The argument in favour of the changes being an effect of methodology is supported by the fact that there were a number of methodological changes in 2014 designed to improve the description of voluntary engagement of the population. Since 2014, for example, a catalogue of criteria has been employed to facilitate transparency in how open-ended disclosures on volunteering are checked. The change in the question in 2014, with

the addition of a time frame of twelve months (previously the question simply asked about “current” volunteering), may have resulted in voluntary activities performed at irregular intervals now being more accurately recorded than in the previous question, which contained no clear time frame.

The argument in favour of a real increase in voluntary commitment lies in the fact that numerous societal changes that have taken place over the past two decades, including the greater participation of women in the labour force, continued expansion in educational opportunities, changes in the life situation of older people with their improved health situation, an ever-increasing number of clubs and the greater prominence of public discussions on voluntary engagement. Further evidence of a real increase over the last twenty years with a stabilisation of the figures at a higher level from 2014 onwards is provided by the fact that not only the Survey on Volunteering, but also other survey-based studies, such as the German Ageing Survey (DEAS, own calculations) or the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP, Burkhardt & Schupp 2019), show increases in volunteering for the entire period, but no significant change in voluntary commitment between 2014 and 2019.

We, therefore, assume that, taken as a whole, the findings of the Survey on Volunteering reflect an actual increase in voluntary engagement over the

last twenty years. It is possible, however, that the increase was hidden by methodological changes made between the first three survey waves, while conversely it may have been overstated by methodological changes made between 2009 and 2014.

### Volunteering changing over time

Voluntary commitment has changed over the last twenty years. On the one hand, there has been a decrease in the figure for volunteers who dedicate a large amount of time and take on a management or board position in their activity. This finding may result from a wider change in the demands made on people's time, with greater investment of time being needed in paid employment or in family activities, reducing the amount of time available for volunteering. Furthermore, the decline in the take-up of leadership functions can be linked to changes at the organisational level in the voluntary sector: Increasing numbers of volunteers carry out their voluntary activity in informally organised settings, whose hierarchical structures are usually flatter, and which require fewer management or board positions (Hagen & Simonson 2017).

On the other hand, over the past two decades, volunteering has been shaped by one of the central social trends of the 21st century – the digital transformation. In 2019, more than half of the volunteers use the internet in the context of their voluntary work. Digital technologies play a major role for many volunteers, though that cannot by any means be said for everyone doing voluntary work.

Furthermore, the increased flow of refugees into the country in 2015 and 2016 was an event that had an impact on volunteering over recent years. Voluntary engagement for refugees and asylum seekers was and remains an essential component in the process of social integration. Between 2014 and 2019, around twelve per cent of the entire population of Germany were involved in volun-

tary engagement for refugees and asylum seekers. And of those volunteering in 2019, eight per cent direct their voluntary activity towards refugees and asylum seekers as their target group.

### Differences and inequalities in volunteering

Volunteering is a form of social participation (Alscher et alia 2018; Roth 2020). However, the findings of this report show that not all population groups participate on an equal basis in volunteering. Yet, there are indications in the direction of wider involvement in volunteering: It is notable in this context that, for the first time since 1999, women and men show no statistically significant difference in terms of their participation in voluntary work. The difference in voluntary engagement between eastern and western Germany are also becoming smaller as time goes on. But the differences in voluntary engagement for people with and without a migrant background, for example, remain substantial. And the divergence between those with lower as against higher levels of educational attainment is clearly growing even wider: People with a higher level of education are becoming ever more involved in voluntary engagement as time goes on, while the lower rate for people with lower educational attainment has stagnated. If these results reflect differing opportunities of access and participation for the various groups, then they may be interpreted as an expression of social inequalities.

Furthermore, differences between population groups can be seen in relation to the societal areas in which people became engaged in volunteering and the form of that voluntary engagement. It is apparent that there are correlations between voluntary work in particular areas and the stage of life of volunteers, as well as the interests, tasks and opportunities associated with those stages of life. For example, having young children may provide a starting point for volunteering at school, kindergarten or even in sports clubs. And we do indeed find largescale involvement in these areas by

people between the ages of 30 and 49 years, a phase of life in which people typically have children of their own. A person's phase of life can also determine the extent to which they are in a position to take on time-intensive commitments or leadership positions on a voluntary basis. It is evident that older volunteers, in particular, engage in time-intensive voluntary activity and are also more likely to take on management or board positions. It can be assumed that young and middle-aged volunteers, in particular, are less likely to take on management or board positions and time-consuming commitments because of the time they need to dedicate to work and family commitments. It is also true that older volunteers often have more extensive experience that they can contribute in leadership roles than do their younger peers.

Besides all the above, the voluntary commitments taken on by women and men (despite their equal rate of volunteering in 2019) may differ significantly in relation to the areas and forms of their voluntary engagement. For example, women are more likely than men to become involved in areas that can be characterised as family-related or social. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more involved than women in politics and in accident and ambulance services and the voluntary fire brigade. Gender differences can also be observed in terms of the amount of time spent in a voluntary activity: Male volunteers spend more time on their voluntary activity than women. Management or board positions in the voluntary activity are more often exercised by men than by women. All these gender differences may be rooted in the patterns still visible in gender-specific division of labour, which are conditioned by differences in the time demands imposed by work and family obligations. Against the background of these divisions of labour, it can be assumed that women are less likely to have the time and opportunity to devote a great deal of time to their voluntary commitments or to take on the obligations of a management or board position.

## Implications

Voluntary commitment is widespread and has grown in importance over the course of time. However, both the rate of volunteering and the form of volunteering can differ significantly from population group to population group. This report focuses, in particular, on differences between women and men and between age groups. The differences we have found can be seen, on the one hand, as being the result of differing preferences. On the other hand, they may also be regarded as the result of social inequality, with the consequent inequities in terms of opportunity to participate in volunteering. Causes may be found, among other factors, in the (continuing) gender-specific social division of labour and in the differing networking opportunities and resources of time that are sometimes related to that division. In addition, reservations on the part of civic organisations can also play a role; in relation to how leadership positions should be filled, for example.

For a policy on voluntary engagement that strives to achieve equal participation opportunities for all, but for the voluntary organisations as well, there remains a lot to be done. Enabling equal opportunities in participation may well represent an opportunity for civil society, helping it to attract and retain more volunteers in long-term commitments. However, the task of facilitating equal opportunities in participation is also one for society as a whole. This is particularly clear in relation to the issue of equality between the genders: Equal participation of women and men in voluntary commitment can only be achieved if there is also a fair division of labour in other areas of society, especially in relation to the workplace and family tasks. In this respect, how voluntary engagement evolves is always embedded in wider social change.

So, how is voluntary engagement likely to evolve over the coming years? This question cannot be answered solely on the basis of a population-

representative survey, which can only provide a snapshot at a particular time. The Corona pandemic in 2020 has produced far-reaching cuts in economic and social life. Civil society has been – and continues to be – significantly affected by these changes. The question of what long-term consequences the Corona pandemic is likely to have for volunteering cannot yet be conclusively answered. Among other effects, though, changes are to be expected in relation to the importance of the internet in volunteering. Aside from this, it will also become clear how rates of participation in and patterns of access to voluntary engagement will develop going forward. The 2019 Survey on Volunteering, the fieldwork for which was done before the start of the Corona pandemic, may provide an anchor against which to compare statements on that topic as informed by subsequent surveys.

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# Methodological Appendix

The German Survey on Volunteering (*Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey* – FWS) is the largest study on voluntary commitment in Germany and provides a central basis upon which to provide social reporting on such commitments. The Survey on Volunteering is a telephone-based representative survey on volunteering in Germany. It has been conducted on five occasions thus far (in 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019). The universe for the Survey on Volunteering is the resident population of Germany living in private households from the age of 14 years upward. The German Survey on Volunteering is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend* – BMFSFJ). The scientific direction of the 2019 Survey on Volunteering was conducted, as in 2014, by the German Centre of Gerontology (*Deutsches Zentrum für Altersfragen* – DZA). Just as in 2014, data collection for the 2019 Survey on Volunteering was carried out by the infas Institute for Applied Social Science (*Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft*). Data from the years 1999, 2004 and 2009 was collected by TNS Infratest. In preparation for the 2019 questionnaire, pretests were carried out for both the German and the foreign-language interviews. The main data collection phase began on 18 March and was completed on 16 November 2019.

## **Interviews via landline and mobile phone**

Two random sub-samples were used for data collection: a base and a supplementary sample.

The base sample takes in landline and mobile phone numbers distributed all over the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. However, interviews carried out in selected federal states using the *Länder*-financed supplementary sample were conducted exclusively using the landline network. All telephone numbers were generated randomly. A total of 19,498 landline interviews were conducted (corresponding to 70.2 per cent of all cases), supplemented by 8,264 interviews via mobile phone (29.8 per cent of all cases).

## **Interview languages**

The interviews for the 2019 Survey on Volunteering were conducted in German as well as in five other languages (English, Arabic, Russian, Turkish and Polish). Aside from German, English (with  $n = 229$ ) is by far the most frequently used language in interviews for the 2019 Survey on Volunteering. It can be assumed that English was used both by respondents whose mother tongue was English and by others with sufficient skill in the language. The second most frequently used language other than German was Arabic ( $n=154$ ), followed by Russian ( $n=103$ ), Turkish ( $n=75$ ) and Polish ( $n=47$ ). A total of 608 interviews were completed in a language other than German (2.2 per cent of all interviews completed). In the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, a total of 4,790 people with a migrant background were interviewed. That means that the percentage figure for people with a migrant background in the 2019 Survey was 17.4 per cent.

### Questions on activities and engagement

One of the core elements in the survey is its two-stage questioning on public activity and voluntary engagement. Respondents were asked about their activities in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering as follows:

There is a range of ways, of getting involved outside of work and family, for example in a club, an initiative, a project or a self-help group. I will name a few different areas that are possible. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you been actively involved in one or more of these areas? Are you or have you been actively involved somewhere...

1. ... in the area of sport and exercise – e.g. in a sports club or in an exercise group?
2. ... in the area of culture and music – e.g. a theatre or music group, a choir, a cultural association or an association for cultural development?
3. ... in the area of leisure and social interaction – e.g. in an allot garden association or a games club?
4. ... in the social area – e.g. in a charity or a different aid organisation, in the neighbourhood help or a self-help group?
5. ... in the health area – e.g. as a helper in healthcare or in visiting services, in an association or a self-help group?
6. ... in the school or nursery area – e.g. in a parents' association, the student board or a development association?
7. ... in youth work outside school or adult education – e.g. looking after children or youth groups or running training programmes?
8. ... in the area of the environment, nature protection or animal rights – e.g. in an according association or project?
9. ... in the area of politics and political interest groups – e.g. in a party, in the local council or town council, in political initiatives or solidarity projects?
10. ... in the area of professional interest groups outside work – e.g. in a trade union, professional association, unemployment initiative?
11. ... in the church or religious area – e.g. in the church, a religious organisation or a religious group?
12. ... in the area of justice and criminality – e.g. as a lay judge or honorary judge, looking after offenders or victims of crime?
13. ... in the accident or ambulance service or in the voluntary fire brigade?
14. ... in an area not yet mentioned – e.g. in citizens' initiatives or working groups on local and traffic development, but also citizens' clubs and others that haven't been mentioned yet?

These areas have also been included in previous surveys since 2004. In the 1999 survey on volunteering 15 areas were examined. In it, very few people declared themselves to be active in the area of economic self-help, and it was, therefore, not included in the subsequent surveys.

If the respondent indicates activity in at least one area, there then follows a question about the tasks or work undertaken:

We are interested now in whether you also do voluntary activities in the areas in which you are involved or if you volunteer in associations, initiatives, projects or self-help groups. We are looking at duties and work taken on voluntarily for little or no remuneration. You said, you are [also] active [name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months:

Have you taken on duties or work in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?

If this question is also answered in the affirmative, there follow three additional questions allowing open-ended answers (the interviewers noted down the respondents' answers in the form of sentences or key words):

1. What type of group, organisation or institution is it in which you volunteer?  
Can you please describe it to me briefly?
2. And what exactly do you do there? What is your duty or what work do you do there?
3. Does your activity have a name? If so, what is it?

In the 2014 and 2019 survey waves, the questions on public community activities and volunteering were asked expressly giving a time window ("in the last twelve months"). In the first three survey waves of the Survey on Volunteering, no specified time frame was given in these questions; interviewers asked about activities and voluntary engagement in which respondents were "currently" engaged. It is possible that voluntary activities undertaken at irregular intervals are now better recorded in response to the query, with its now clearly defined time window, than in the previous one, which had no such clear specification. If it turns out that respondents estimate the time span differently in response to the less precise question, tending to think in terms of a smaller time window, some activities performed at irregular intervals may remain hidden as a result. It may be that the significant increase in the rate of volunteering seen between the 2009 and the 2014 survey waves can be partially attributed to this methodological change.

### Checking the data on voluntary engagement

The self-reported data on voluntary commitment that we collect is subjected to a substantive check to assess whether the information is consistent with the underlying definition of voluntary commitment used for the purposes of the survey. In the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, this was checked in two steps, one during and one after the interview. As part of the interview, everyone who had provided information on voluntary engagement was asked once more whether the relevant activity constituted a voluntary activity, performed either without any payment at all or in return for a low level of remuneration to compensate for any expenses incurred. Respondents are treated as 'volunteers' in subsequent sections of the interview – and are, therefore, asked the questions relating to the content and organisation of their voluntary commitment – only in cases in which they have answered this query in the affirmative. After the interview has been com-

pleted, a second check is run based on the open-ended answers noted down by the interviewer. On the basis of a list of criteria (see Table A), along with guidance on the practical application of these criteria, it was checked whether the activities mentioned by the respondent really constituted voluntary commitments. By means of a negative control, the relevant activities were not evaluated as voluntary commitments if they contradicted any one of the criteria. Where information was incomplete, the self-assessment of the respondent was accepted and the activity was evaluated as voluntary engagement.

The following catalogue of criteria is used for the check: *active, unpaid, public and collaborative*. The *voluntary* criterion has already been checked in a standardised query during the interview itself. In addition, because (in 2019) no mandatory social service is required in Germany, it is possible to dispense with any systematic examination of the voluntary nature of activities based on the open-ended data.

It was not possible to assess the benefits of volunteering to the common good, as the necessary information was not collected during the Survey on Volunteering. The most prominent reason for this is the fact that the notion of being directed towards the public interest is difficult to define for operational purposes: The question as to whether something is directed toward the public interest can be defined in widely differing, and even contradictory, ways, depending on a very wide range of normative and value systems. An activity that is understood as 'directed towards the public interest' against the background of a certain value system can be interpreted as 'damaging to the public interest' if a competing value system is adopted. On top of this, it can be assumed that any survey looking at what is directed towards the public interest would strongly be subjected to the influence of social desirability. The issue of whether voluntary activities are directed towards the public interest was, therefore, examined neither in the 2019 Survey wave nor in the previous ones; rather, it was taken for granted from the very first wave of the Survey on Volunteering.

Table A: Catalogue of criteria for checking open-ended questions

Criterion	The activity is considered to be volunteering as long as none of the listed statements are contradicted.	The activity is not considered to be volunteering if at least one of listed statements are confirmed.	Examples of activities not considered to be volunteering
Active	The participant's entry constitutes an activity.	The participant's entry constitutes a passive membership or a donation.	Membership of booster club; blood donor
Unpaid	The activity is not directed towards material gain.	It constitutes a professional, paid or in-house activity conducted within work time.	Work placement at mechanical workshop; works council; training for geriatric carer
Public	The activity is conducted in the public sphere.	It constitutes a family activity or an activity conducted privately among friends	Maternal care; I take care of the child of a friend of mine.
Collaborative	The activity is conducted either collaboratively or cooperatively.	It constitutes the pursuit of a hobby, without any of the features of a collaborative team effort.	Small allotments – I keep my garden in order; adult education centres – I'm doing a course in something

Source: FWS 2019. Own presentation (DZA).

In the 2019 Survey of Volunteering, the figure for people whose status changed from ‘volunteer’ to ‘non-volunteer’ as a result of the check by using the open-end questions was 2.6 per cent of all people who had self-assessed as ‘volunteering’ during the interview. In previous survey waves, this figure was 3.5 per cent in 1999, 5.4 per cent in 2004, 10.1 per cent in 2009 and 1.6 per cent in 2014. The figure for 1999 is an estimate since not all the information required for the calculation was available to us. It appears that the figure for people who assess themselves as ‘volunteer’ but were rated as a ‘non-volunteer’ as a result of the checks differs substantially from survey wave to survey wave. From 1999 through 2004 to 2009, an increasing number of activities were recoded, and the status of an increasing number of people was changed from ‘volunteer’ to ‘non-volunteer’. This may have led to an underestimate of the rate of volunteering for the year 2009 in particular.

### Weighting the data including educational attainment

In the Survey on Volunteering up until the latest wave, the weighting was designed to take account of the probability of selection of a person (based on household size, number of fixed network telephone numbers, as well as number of mobile numbers), combined with weightings to compensate for deviations between the sample distribution and the real-world population distribution on a number of dimensions (federal state, size-based typology of municipality, gender, age groups).

The procedure for weighting the data was adapted for the report on the 2019 Survey on Volunteering by adding an additional weighting factor relating to the level of school education. In social science surveys – and the samples of the Survey on Volunteering are no exception – people with high educational attainment are frequently overrepresented as compared to their presence in the resident population in Germany. At the same time, people with a high level of education are also more likely to become involved in volunteering, all of which means that the proportion of the population involved in voluntary commitment tends to get overestimated if educational attainment is not included as a weighting factor. Weighting the data from the Survey on Volunteering according to educational attainment will,

therefore, allow it to better represent the resident population of Germany aged 14 and above. However, the inclusion of education as a weighting characteristic in all survey years has also had the effect that rates of volunteering for all previous survey years are now three to four percentage points lower than originally reported (see Table 2–1 in section 2). When looking at rates of volunteering over time, the level changes, but the trend of increasing volunteer rates over the last twenty years essentially remains intact. In other results, too, deviations from the data given in earlier publications can be seen. The findings reported in this report on the basis of the Survey on Volunteering are based exclusively on weighted analyses whose weighting takes account of educational attainment.

### Sampling and representativeness

In every survey year, the Survey on Volunteering was conducted in the form of a standardised telephone-based interview (CATI – Computer Assisted Telephone Interview). The universe for the study is the resident population of Germany living in private households from the age of 14 years upward. The sample sizes of the Survey on Volunteering were expanded above and beyond those in previous waves of the survey. In 1999, a total of 14,922 people were interviewed, while 15,000 were interviewed in 2004, 20,005 were interviewed in 2009 and in 2014 the figure was 28,690. In 2019, a total of 27,762 people were interviewed.

Table B shows the sample distribution by gender, age and (school) educational attainment for the survey year 2019. A comparison of the distribution of population groups in the Survey on Volunteering with that provided by official statistics (the German microcensus, column 4) reveals that women and older persons are slightly overrepresented in the survey (unweighted sample, column 1). This overrepresentation has already been re-balanced relatively well by the weightings without considering education (column 2). In addition to all this, though, it can be seen that in the sample used for the Survey on Volunteering, persons with a low level of educational attainment are underrepresented while persons with a high level are overrepresented. This issue is a commonly encountered educational bias in survey-based

research: People with medium and higher levels of education tend to be more willing to participate in surveys than people with lower levels of education. While this educational bias is not completely compensated for in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering by the weighting applied on the basis of

educational attainment, the new weighting has significantly mitigated the issue (column 3): The distribution of educational qualifications now shown deviates far less from the distribution shown in official statistics (column 4) than does the unweighted initial sample (column 1).

Table B: Distribution of the central features of the random sample for the 2019 Survey on Volunteering

	FWS 2019 unweighted	FWS 2019 weighted without educational attainment	FWS 2019 weighted with educational attainment	Microcensus 2019
<b>Gender</b>				
Women	52.5	50.9	50.9	50.8
Men	47.5	49.1	49.1	49.2
<b>Age groups</b>				
14–29 years	10.1	20.1	20.1	19.4
30–49 years	21.6	29.1	29.1	29.3
50–64 years	34.3	25.8	25.6	26.7
65 years and above	34.1	25.0	25.2	24.6
<b>Education</b>				
Still at school	2.0	3.4	3.7	3.5
Lower educational attainment	16.2	17.4	30.5	34.0
Medium educational attainment	32.3	29.2	28.1	28.8
Higher educational attainment	49.5	50.1	37.6	33.6

Source: FWS 2019; Micro-census 2019; own presentation (DZA).

Note: Educational certifications are only recorded in official statistics from the age of 15. Accordingly, in the Survey on Volunteering, details for the distribution of educational qualifications are reported only for people aged 15 and over. Deviations in percentage values are due to rounding.

### Significance check

In the analyses, differences between population groups and between survey waves are checked for statistical significance. If a finding is statistically significant, the result may be generalised to the population of the German resident population aged 14 and above. The threshold for statistical significance is taken at  $p < 0.05$ . This means that if a result is statistically significant, it can be

assumed with at least 95 per cent probability that the relevant difference also exists in the whole population. The significance tests are carried out on the basis of the weighted data. The results of the checks for statistical significance are presented under each of the figures and tables. Both statistically significant and statistically insignificant results are reported, as the latter may well be of interest if there are no group differences or where there are no changes over time.

## Differentiating features

The following differentiation criteria are used in this report:

### *Gender*

In the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, an option to indicate 'other' as gender was added for the first time, in addition to 'female' and 'male'. However, a total of only three people indicated this new category. Due to the small number of cases (based on a percentual cut-off level of  $n < 50$ ), the rates for people indicating a gender of other cannot be shown separately. In terms of data disclosure, no separate statement may be made on this group for reasons of data protection. For the analyses, and also for subsequent data output, persons who indicated 'other' as their gender are assigned to the female group. For the purposes of the weighting variables too, the 'other' category was also assigned to the female category, with the justification that there are as yet no official figures for the gender indication 'other' in relation to which the marginal distribution may be adjusted. Such cases were, therefore, assigned to the largest category in terms of absolute numbers (more women than men participated in the survey) in order to minimise their effect on the distribution. Gender information marked as 'missing' in the data set may, in a similar way to the 'other' designation, make it possible, as a result of the small number of cases, to draw conclusions on the relevant individuals, and would, therefore, not be acceptable either for data protection reasons. All gender-specific findings in this report are, therefore, presented exclusively for two groups: women (incorporating other) and men.

Likewise, the way in which gender is recorded as a differentiation criterion in the Survey on Volunteering should be noted. Respondents are not asked their gender: rather an entry is made by the interviewer at the beginning of the telephone conversation. The option is open to ask the respondent their gender in cases where the interviewer is unsure. Furthermore, it is also possible for respondents to correct the statement of gender for them if they feel misclassified by the gender-specific formulations used by the interviewer in follow-up questions. It should be said,

however, that not everyone may want to use this opportunity. One possible consequence of this procedure is that people with, other, as their assigned gender may have been assigned to either the male or female category early in the interview, with the effect that the number of people of the, other, category may be underestimated. We chose not to use the option of asking gender directly in the interview, as such an approach might be perceived as strange by respondents in telephone interviews, thus leading to an increase in drop-outs. The procedure of using a direct question was tested in the pretests for the 2014 Survey on Volunteering, but was discarded for the main study on the basis of negative feedback from respondents (see Schiel & Quandt 2014).

### *Age groups*

Throughout this report, a distinction is made between four age groups. 14- to 29-year-olds, 30- to 49-year-olds, 50- to 64-year-olds, and the 65-year-olds and above group.

### *Education groups*

A distinction is made in this report between four groups in terms of their differing levels of school educational attainment: people still attending school at the time of the survey; people with a low level of education: with educational qualifications up to and including primary school and the secondary school type known in Germany as *Hauptschule*, as well as a school-leaving certificate from the GDR upon finishing eighth grade; people with an intermediate level of education: an intermediate school-leaving certificate (for example, the *Realschulabschluss*), the school-leaving certificate upon completing tenth grade in the GDR or leaving certificate from a foreign school within the compulsory system; and people with a high level of education: *Fachhochschulreife*, higher school-leaving certificate (*Abitur*), leaving certificate from an Extended Secondary School (*erweiterte Oberschule*) in the GDR or from a higher-level secondary school (*weiterführende Schule*) abroad. In order to ensure comparability with previous waves of the survey, no differentiation is made on the basis of higher educational qualifications, as these were either not surveyed at all or not surveyed in a comparable form in earlier waves.



*Migrant background*

This report considers the level of engagement among people with a background involving migration by comparison to that of people with no migration in their background. To distinguish between these two groups, respondents' country of birth and, where applicable, the year in which they first moved to Germany are included. In addition to the above, the country of birth of their parents is considered. Further differentiation is carried out in an additional step following the conceptual framework used by the Federal Statistical Office (Federal Statistical Office 2019). A distinction is also made between subgroups of people with a migrant background: people with personal immigration experience not possessing German citizenship; people with personal immigration experience now possessing German citizenship; people with a migrant background born in Germany but not possessing German citizenship; and people with a migrant background born in Germany and possessing German citizenship. This categorisation can be made on the basis of the data from the 2014 and 2019 waves of the survey; the information on migrant background was not collected in a comparable manner in the previous survey waves.

*East-West distinction*

In order to make a comparison between the east and west of the country, the various federal states

were bundled as follows: Western German federal states: Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Bremen, Hamburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein. Eastern German federal states: Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia.

*Urban versus Rural*

Urban versus rural differences were displayed according to the aggregated indicators made available by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (*Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung – BBSR*). The distinction used in the survey is the one based on an urban versus rural regional typology (BBSR 2019). All large county boroughs and urban districts are defined as urban areas, while all rural districts are placed in the rural category. The data on the type of region, whether urban or rural, is fed into the survey data via the respondent's local district code. That district code is determined via the postcode recorded in the interview. Since not all respondents consented to the inclusion of their regional information with the survey data and because the pattern of consent is not entirely randomly distributed across all respondents, an additional default weighting is applied to the data for the analyses by region type.







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